ON AN ENGLISH SCREEN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BELLES LETTRES

- L. of C. (LINES OF COMMUNICATION)
- FANTASIES AND IMPROMPTUS
- WHITE HORSE AND RED LION

NOVELS

- RESPONSIBILITY
- BLESSED ARE THE RICH

ESSAYS OF THE THEATRE

- BUZZ, BUZZ!
- ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS
- AT HALF-PAST EIGHT
- THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

ON AN ENGLISH SCREEN

BY

JAMES AGATE

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TO

NORA HEALD AND EDITH SHACKLETON

GOOD JOURNALISTS

AND

BETTER FRIENDS

PREFACE

AN EDITOR once said to me: "Too many authors "think they are 'writing down,' when they are "merely writing badly. What I want for my readers "is not the inferior work of the best writers, but "the best work of middling writers endeavouring to "become better."

The following essays were written in great part for the *Daily Chronicle*, a newspaper whose readers number more than a million. As pieces of writing they are not intended to be profound, yet they have been conceived in sincerity.

J. A.

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ON AN ENGLISH SCREEN

YPRES REVISITED

Let not my title deceive the reader. I was never in Flanders before August 4 of last year, and until that day knew Ypres only in the spirit. I do not presume to write here for those who remember the little town in the time which was at once its agony and its heyday ; it is not for me to go fumbling among sacred emotions. For sacred they must be, whatever cloak the Englishman may use to make them presentable before his shy soul.

I write rather for those who have known that which was once called the Salient by hearsay only and at second-hand, from the despatches and newspaper reports. Second-hand, yet it is to be thought that, in those days, knowledge came to us in some way which was not a mere piecing together ; we saw Ypres in a flash. Imagination is the lightning of the mind, and the murdered landscape, for those who knew it not, became in those years of battle suddenly familiar as the fields of boyhood.

Everything was exactly as I expected to find it —in the spirit. Superficially, all was changed. Belgium is healed. Every wound is closed and every shell-hole is filled up ; those fields to-day are as fair as our own. True that the forest of Houthoulst still stands in naked distress, its ruined choirs remaining for a token and a memory. Six miles from Ostend there rises from the smiling land a fragment of what was once a château, striking upon the eye with all the suddenness of a *coup de théâtre.* For the rest there is not more desolation than you shall see in the old football ground at Stamford Bridge. Nature has forgiven.

It is impossible to believe that War was ever here. Even the old bricks are cleared away, and those heaps of smoking ruins are once again a village. There is, perhaps, a trifle too much ecstasy of new red brick, and a smack of unreality about these pink houses with the terra-cotta roofs ; they are over-flushed with victory.

Soon after passing the ruined château the chauffeur stopped and pointed to a flourishing farmhouse. It was there, he said, that ten of his regiment were surprised by the Germans. Six of his comrades were killed ; he and three others escaped by hiding themselves in straw. A plain fairy-tale ; there never was any war ! At Dixmude they gave us beer in a little café called *A la bataille de l'Yser*, but still it was as though peace had always reigned. The bridge over the canal is not yet completely repaired, but the interruption of the traffic does not seem of greater significance than Piccadilly knows. Dixmude was beflagged — one guessed in some purely civilian celebration.

Shortly after leaving this prosperous village we saw the first of the monuments, that erected to Guynemer by his brother-airmen. This is essentially French in its exquisiteness of form, and also, be it said, in the unashamed rhetoric, almost the theatricality, of its inscription. At the top of a tall and elegant column is a flying stork, neck and legs outstretched, supported, one gathers, by the dropped wings. There is a suggestion of the aeroplane here which the eagle of our monument on the Embankment does not convey. On the plinth is a bronze inscription which Cyrano de Bergerac might have devised, acclaiming Guynemer as individual hero—" *Héros légendaire tombé en plein ciel de gloire* "—but also presenting him as symbol of the qualities of the French race and an example " meet for the noblest emulations." But in reading this rhapsody you forget the humble dead and remember Corneille.

A mile or so farther on stands a monument which affected me almost beyond the power of stone. From a grey sheath grow the head and shoulders of a Canadian soldier. The head, crowned with the familiar helmet, is bent, the hands are folded upon a reversed rifle; the soldier watches over those who sleep beneath. On the front of the plinth is the single word "Canada." On the sides, in raised yet hardly decipherable lettering, is the bare statement:

> "On this spot 18,000 Canadians on the British left withstood the first German gas attack, April 22-24, 1915. 2000 fell and were buried here."

This has almost the power of the Greek: "Stranger, depart and tell the Lacedemonians that we lie here obeying their laws." One bows the head in humble acceptance; the bravest ornament were out of place. There is a mysterious power in this brooding figure, drawing you from the things that are to the things that were. It does more than command the landscape—it orders the spirit. The Guynemer monument is a pretty thing and a fine gesture; this is the soul of those who fell. It is conceivable that a grey day might add to the spiritual significance of this memorial; in the blazing August sun its shock was overwhelming.

Not far away is the "Oxford Road" Cemetery, containing the bodies of those who fell here, 1915-1918. This quiet acre is beautifully kept. A little wooden shrine by the simple entrance-gate contains the roll of those whose names are known. It is unlocked, so that we who pass may read.

The first of the tiny tombstones is to one unnamed. It bears at the top the words, " A Soldier of the Great War," and at the bottom, " Known unto God." The second marks the resting-place of an unnamed Australian soldier, known unto God. The third gives the name of an English boy, his drummer's rank, his regiment and regimental device. And so on. These are the poet's rich dead, who

> " Laid the world away ; poured out the red
> Sweet wine of youth ; gave up the years to be
> Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene
> That men call age."

It is these graves which bind up the England that is with the England that was, which bring back the exaltation and the catch at the throat, that sense of the fullness of life which leapt singing into the arms of Death. Just as some jolly boy gave the name of " Skindles " to the little *estaminet* which is now the biggest hotel in Ypres, so his " Oxford Road " fancy is to be preserved for ever.

On this bright August day the years fade, and here again are the wind and the rain, the mud and the engines of terror, the unending boredom and the swift pain. Once more English humour and our land's imperishable spirit walk the earth. These things, having once been, must ever be. But you have to stand before these simple stones to realize that, in essence, England has not changed, and that at heart we have not forgotten.

And now the journey takes on the aspect of a despatch from the front. Poelcappelle, Langemarck, St. Julien, Zonnebeke—the names of these hamlets bring back old amazement.

At last we spy the tower of the Cloth Hall, from which a flag is flying. As we approach, the sound of the hurdy-gurdy strikes upon our ears ; there is a fair in full swing. There, in that market-place once swept by mortal hail, at the very feet of the hallowed pile, on the spot where our dearest fell, are the steam-boats and the roundabouts. One's first thought is that this is the very abomination of desecration. And then one reflected that the War was fought that peaceable citizens the world over might enjoy their fairs in peace. For hundreds of years, perhaps, at this season and in this place there has been gaiety ; we conquered that this should still be. The dead will understand. Still it was something of a shock that, as we turned into the Menin Road, the car should be held up by competitors in a cycle-race. For if anywhere there be sacred ground, it is surely here. There were side-shows now, and a booth in front of which women were dancing. . . .

The road is smooth to-day and we bowl along at a fair pace. Hooge has its brand-new château, and

Sanctuary Wood is a pleasant coppice. At the memorial erected to the Gloucesters just before Gheluvelt I stop and ponder upon those tiny prominences, Passchendaele, Kemmel, Hill 60. Once they were the boundaries of the civilized world.

We return via Poperinghe and Furnes, and at Nieuport cross the Yser, which, with its bridge, is exactly like the photographs. And then home. Strange that in a few short hours you can turn a page of history which four years wrote in the blood of a generation ! Strange how the world has shrunk ! Strange that there can be such a thing as dressing for dinner in this land of the mighty dead ! But the clock goes on, and life must be lived. The dead hear no human sound, no click of gaming counters. But, for myself, I forsake the saloons, watch the sun go down into the sea, and sit staring at vacancy till the stars swing to their places.

BOX AND COX

I WAS just about fed up.

At 9 A.M. Euphonius Bloggs arrived, desirous of playing over on my piano a symphonic poem which had smitten him overnight.

"What does it mean?" I asked, after the last cacophony had died away.

"*Mean?*" cried Euphonius, in a voice expressive of withering contempt, which failed simply because I do not wither easily. "Mean? Of course it doesn't mean anything! It 's expressive of primitive Russian emotion."

"Just that?"

"Just that."

You wouldn't think it, but Bloggs is really rather a decent sort. His father keeps a chemist's shop at Golders Green, which isn't against the lad really. Only he doesn't know it. He wants, he says, to free himself from his environment, and incidentally to express the soul of Russia. Now this seems to me to be sheer impertinence. Do I want some longhaired, unkempt Bolshevik to express for me the soul of Camberwell or Peckham Rye? No. So I bundled Euphonius out of doors, and told him to go home and compose a set of variations on the theme: "Through Putney with a Perambulator."

At 10 A.M. I took up a book which some kind American publisher had sent me with a note soliciting my comments. The first sentence to catch my eye contained the names Voltaire and Rousseau, considerable people, I have always heard, in their day. Yet my American author calls them "sewage rats who brought in the scourge of revolution." Tolstoy and Kropotkin were "decadent nobles" who made the world ready for "intellectual sadists and moral idiots, minotaurs and rattlesnakes." After this it was, perhaps, not surprising to find H. G. Wells, Barbusse, Bertrand Russell, and Bernard Shaw lumped together as "decadent burghers who live in beautiful—no, costly—homes, surrounded by every conceivable luxury, including Sealyhams, the most expensive of pets."

I take that to be a capital picture. I love to think of Mr. Shaw enthroned on a beautiful—no, costly—settee, plotting some new feat of decadence and stroking the head of his favourite Sealyham the while. My American author goes on to say that, in his opinion, Mr. Shaw is a "pacifist, socialist, ostrich-like sentimentalist," in whom are expressed unwittingly—" unwittingly " is good—" the unbelief, hysterical self-exploitation, neurotic self-consciousness, pretentiousness, vulgarity, brutality, inane vanity, lack of respect, loss of dignity and tradition, falsification of all human values of our epoch." Finally I am told that this great Irishman wields a " dirt-cheap spade of factory-made wit."

I take up no cudgels here for Mr. Shaw. None are needed, and, if they were, who so happy to wield them as the writer attacked? And then one cannot defend all the brains in creation! Maeterlinck is set down as the man who " etherialized psychothenic maudlinism." Wells is the author of the " most fatuously inhuman and pathologically silly statement ever made outside of a madhouse."

Well, well !

I turn to the title-page and see that the author of this pernicious nonsense is a Mr. Henry Clews, Junior, and I wonder what Mr. Henry Clews, Senior, thinks of his son's performance. But perhaps that young man has not shown papa his book. . . Perhaps papa wields a hefty slipper. . . .

At 11 A.M. a young poet walked in. I am, I confess, a poor judge of poetry—at least of modern poetry. I hope I know a great passage when I see it. Such lines as Marlowe's invocation to the sunset :

"See—see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament,"

or Shakespeare's

> "O! how shall summer's honey breath hold out
> Against the wrackful siege of battering days?"

seem to me not only to fulfil Coleridge's dictum that poetry must begin by being sense, but to conform to my own standard, which is that poetry must also end by being sense.

But this modern stuff . . .

My young friend adjusted his spectacles, of the horn-rimmed variety which turns a man's eyes into twin craters of imbecility, pulled out half a sheet of notepaper and intoned the line—

"Irreducible adiposity."

"Wait a moment," I interrupted. "What 's the thing called?"

"'A London Omnibus.'"

"Go on."

My friend resumed :

> "Irreducible adiposity
> Swollen
> Hands and
> Feet
> Grock
> Syphonobranchiate dithyrambics
> Me."

"What do you think of it?" he asked, after a pause which I had found no means to curtail.

"It is," I replied at length, "a remarkable work. So oleaginous, so subfusc."

"I thought you'd like it," he gurgled, throwing back the wisps of lank hair which had strayed into his mouth during his recital of the last line but one.

"And now," I said with some vigour, "get out!" And he got out with a celerity which very nearly sprained my big toe.

Yes. I was pretty well fed up.

The management of the Coliseum Theatre having kindly invited me to witness a revival of the old farce, *Box and Cox*, I hied me to that theatre in search of intelligible recreation.

I found a pleasant piece, all about two lodgers who inhabit the same room unknown to one another, the one sleeping by night, the other by day. I found Box looking like David Copperfield, and Cox looking like Traddles, and a landlady in a crinoline who might have been Julia Mills. ("Why not twin-lodgers? Are not Sun and Moon twin-boarders of the universe?—J. M.") The other characters were a rasher of bacon and a chop. I was sure that Box would not have glimpsed the meaning of "syphonobranchiate," and that the charm of "dithyrambics" would have been lost upon Cox.

This seemed to be a real world, and these to be real people. Whereas my musician and my poet, and the little American scribbler . . .

AN OLD PHOTOGRAPH

Some little time ago I was strolling down one of those mean streets with which the British are careful to surround their more important buildings. It is almost as though " the authorities "—whoever they may be—begrudged the nation its Museum. Of all places in London this Temple of Knowledge is, to the provincial and the foreigner, the least accessible. Tramcars eschew it, 'buses pass it by. That is to say, they do not pass by it. Alight at the Tube station miscalled Museum, ascend to the upper air, and there is still no sign of any Temple. " Tutankhamen's Tomb " would serve as well.

There is an old and untrue story about an Englishman who inquired of a Strasburger the way to his cathedral. " You take," said the docile Teuton, " the first to the right and the second to the left. This will bring you to a square at one corner of which is a tobacconist's. The cathedral is in the middle." The Londoner might say the same. He would tell you to get out at the station called Museum, to take the first to left or right—I can never remember which—execute a rear movement, turn round several corners till you come to a curiosity shop. "Opposite," he would say, "is what you are looking for."

I was gazing abstractedly into the windows of this aforesaid curiosity shop, and pondering upon the extraordinary workings of the British mind, when my eye fell upon the most entrancing vision of loveliness I have ever beheld. The object was an ordinary photograph taken by the ordinary, *i.e.* fashionable, photographer, whose sitters seem to be confined entirely to the highest circles of the nobility and stage. There was a time when the illustrated magazines were not quite so lavish in their presentment of the social and theatrical world as they are to-day. The public starved for want of images of those whom it held dear, and there was an enormous demand for cabinet photographs at, I think, two shillings each.

I continue to gaze in that shop-window. The vision which now enthralls me, and holds me literally spell-bound, is Ellen Terry as she first appeared to my boyish gaze. She is wearing a simple white frock, and looking down over a plaster-of-paris balcony. I cannot be sure about the piece; perhaps it is *The Amber Heart.* But what does it matter? Whatever the play, be sure that that beauty shattered it to bits as to-day this photographer's pasteboard and most exquisite remembrancer annihilates the clumsy casts of famous sculptors in the stuffy old building over the way. Antique time holds no rapture like that which was Ellen Terry in the days of my youth. A great Spanish singer who had travelled the world over once told me that eighty years had not shown him any loveliness comparable to that April morning, sunshine and tears, which was Ellen. Apple-blossom and orchard-surf are, in my view, dross and dowdiness in comparison with that new gold and morning glory.

Ellen Terry's features were, perhaps, not beautiful in the classical sense—that is, measured with a tape. But they spoke of better things than regularity ; of gladness, heart, and wit. Not long ago the great actress supped at the house of an old friend of mine, who, with infinite care, prepared to put his honoured guest, all muffled up against the cold, into her cab.

" Boost me in ! " she said in that voice like plum-coloured velvet.

The driver spoke.

" H'and the lidy as I 've the h'onour ter drive is Miss H'Ellen Terry ! Larst time I see'd yer, mum, was at the Lyceum, in 1882. As Juliet, wiv 'Enery Irving, if yer remember ! "

" There now, Courtenay," she said, " I told you I hadn't altered ! "

" Got any old photographs, stage-beauties and that sort of thing ? " I asked the shop-keeper carelessly, with my heart in my mouth. I felt that, at cost of no matter what regret, I must not go beyond ten guineas.

"We 've got Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson when he was plain Mister."

"Let 's have a look at him."

And Mr. Forbes-Robertson stands forth, in doublet and hose, and the general air which he must have worn for Gratiano, Mercutio, Horatio, or some graceful Veronese. He is mine for two shillings.

"There 's Vesta Tilley about the same date."

And a portrait is produced showing that darling in 1902 — was it? She is singing "Welcome, C.I.V.'s," wears a waistcoat quartered with our country's arms, and carries the Union Jack aloft at the end of a dandy's cane. I go to half a crown for Vesta.

"Isn't that Ellen Terry in the window?" I breathe tremblingly.

"She 's more," is the reply. "I can't let *her* go under five shillings."

"Lyceum, 1888," was written on the back.

Yesterday I was entertaining a few people to lunch in my most modest of flats. The talk turned upon *Our Betters*, and the shimmering beauty and talent of Miss Margaret Bannerman. With her was contrasted Miss Constance Collier, whose splendid sullens and mutinous air were declared by one of her sex up to putting Herod in his place. The talk veered to Miss Gladys Cooper, Miss Isobel Elsom, Miss Barbara Hoffe, June, and might have constituted a "legend of fair women."

I rose, went to the mantelpiece, took down the photograph, and placed it on the table.

There was a moment's silence. Then one spoke.

"That 's different!" he said.

And I think that when the poet wrote of "the glory and the dream" he meant no more.

"Different," that 's all.

A SCRAP-BOOK

At the same time that I became possessor of the photograph of Ellen Terry in the 'eighties I bought an old scrap-book, a huge affair of some two hundred pages. A single glance revealed that it was full of dramatic criticisms of a bygone day. When I got the book home I discovered that it had been consecrated to Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, and contained all the important "notices" of the productions at the Lyceum for a period of ten years. Also all the great actor's speeches and discourses.

I judge from the extreme care with which the book is put together, the skill in dovetailing, arranging and pasting, the neatness of the dating and the omission to give the names of the papers, print to a woman being just print—I judge from all these that the compiler was a maiden lady on the shadier side of forty. The articles so carefully culled cover a period from 1881 to 1890—the heyday of the Lyceum Theatre. They are from all the more serious London journals of the period, plentifully relieved by the comic Press. The first play noticed is *The Belle's*

Stratagem, the last, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's *Judah*. As I turn these pages I relive my own theatrical impressions between the ages of four and thirteen. It will, I think, be more amusing to my readers if, in what follows, I frankly step aside, and let them rummage for themselves in this storehouse of forgotten treasure.

On an early page we find *Punch* apologizing for the shortness of its "notice," and regretting that it can find room for no more than the great actor's "too utterly precious legs," as the impressionable young ladies of the period called them. This is followed by an account of the banquet offered to the owner of the legs at the St. James's Hall on July 4, 1883. The occasion was the actor's forthcoming American tour. First we get the newspaper account of the affair, running to six columns of the premier print of the country. Then a plan of the tables, showing how celebrities and nobodies rubbed shoulders. The Lord Chief Justice (Lord Coleridge) presided, and had the American Minister (the Hon. J. Russell Lowell) on his other side. At the top table also were the Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., Professor Tyndall, Mr. J. L. Toole, and Mr. Alma Tadema, R.A. *Eheu fugaces!*

The menu consisted of turtle soup à la Prince de Denmark, salmon with Othello sauce, fillets of sole à la Jingle, chicken à la Macbeth—"all my pretty chickens and their dam at one fell swoop," says Macduff—quails cooked according to Richelieu's liking, ducks as Robert Macaire would have them, a salad after Benedick's heart, and a mayonnaise to please that rascal Dubosc. Ladies were privileged to look on from above whilst their lords fed; a picture shows Miss Terry reclining under a palm and feasting her eyes. As befitting these more delicate vessels, refreshments in the balcony consisted of ices and strawberries and cream. The compiler of my scrap-book religiously kept and pasted in the counterfoil of her ticket, showing that she occupied seat No. 91 in row No. 2 in the balcony. Next to it, carefully preserved, is the rose she wore. The principal speakers were the Lord Chief, Lord Houghton, Toole, and, of course, the guest of honour; the entertainers were Sims Reeves, Santley, and Antoinette Sterling. For days the papers were full of nothing else, and the comic journals blossomed into atrocious puns. The worst of these accompanied a picture of the Ghost of Shakespeare waking Irving up in the middle of the night and asking him if he proposed to play Malvolio in A-merry-key.

During Irving's absence Wilson Barrett took the centre of the British stage, posturing, as a severe critic said, "in a *décolleté* night-gown to some poor trull in the gallery." One paper said that Wilson B., like Joey B., was "sly, devilish sly," and had only waited for Irving to turn his back to play Hamlet. And what a Hamlet! Immediately on his return the old man put on the same play. (Sarah Bernhardt once asked how Réjane had played Frou-Frou. "Splendidly!" was the answer. Sarah glared like a tigress. "Bien!" she said. "Je le jouerai demain, *moi*!!!!") Judging from the account of the reception of this Hamlet, the rest was not silence but noise. Wilde, who was present, made the acute criticism that the First Player spoke his lines too well. He should overact them like a provincial tragedian, and so give point to Hamlet's advice (and rebuke) to the players. The witty fellow ended with the hope that it would be some time before Irving or Miss Terry again crossed "that disappointing Atlantic Ocean."

Then there is a break in the spate of heroic admiration whilst the compiler records the enthusiasm let loose by the first performance of *The Mikado*—a character and a country which Gilbert evoked out of his inner consciousness as the German professor did the camel. But this is a single lapse, and the Irving-Terry duet is resumed, to be broken only by a long account of the Bancrofts' farewell. It would almost seem as if the theatre of those days ranked more importantly than it does now. Here, for example, is a four-column "notice" of the production of *Faust*. Four columns, each containing a thousand words! As I read my blood tingles again. Alas that cold print can never reproduce the look, the voice, the anguish in the heart of Ellen Terry as she spoke the words:

> "Tomorrow I must die,
> And I must tell thee how to range the graves,
> My mother the best place—next her my brother,
> Me well apart, but, dearest, not too far,
> And by my side my little one shall lie."

"No one who ever heard it will willingly forget the sweetness Miss Terry imparted to this passage." No one has forgotten it. The whole art of our tenderest actress is summed up in that "But, dearest, not too far."

The compilation ends with the death of Irving. And I imagine that never was account of ceremony at the Abbey pasted in scrap-book with heavier heart.

AND ANOTHER

One of my friends, a celebrated professional pianist, endures the following nightmare on the eve of every public appearance. He is in the artists' room, and overhead the orchestra is tuning up. A roar of applause tells him that Sir Henry Wood has mounted the rostrum. He hears the first notes of Weber's Overture to *Der Freischütz.* In ten minutes he must face the dread stairs, ascend the platform, make obeisance to the crowded tiers, and bring down his hands in the opening, thunderous chords. Choice of torment follows. Either the piano is not there, or he must perform by heart a new concerto of which he has not been allowed to see the score.

Since I started lecturing I have taken to myself a nightmare of like malignancy. My lecture is at Putney, at seven. It is five minutes to the hour, and I am no nearer than West Ham, chafing in an old-fashioned growler drawn by a decrepit horse. Then my dream changes too, and in ten seconds I am facing my audience, only to find that I have left my manuscript at home.

If only people knew how little the knowledge of a certain lecturer extends beyond his sheaf of notes! Whereas the impression conveyed by one proficient in the art is, I am sure, that his words are but crumbs fallen from the complete Table of Wisdom, odd grains from a bursting granary, drops from an overfull goblet. Did audiences but know how carefully my little field has been gleaned, so that no wisp of learning gatherable by me shall have been left unadded to the lean store. Ostentatiously I keep my eye on watch or clock, hoping to intimate thereby that I shall be pressed for time in which to expose the fullness of my treasure. In reality I am wondering if my material will last out; there are ten minutes still to go, and but two ideas left. Once, towards the end of my address, and when I was utterly stumped for further matter, I had what I conceived to be a brilliant idea. I turned to the chairman.

"I should be wearying you, sir, and my audience too," I said, "were I to pursue my subject in its inexhaustible ramifications."

And with that prepared to sit down.

To my horror, I heard proceeding from the audience noises which reporters are accustomed to call "encouraging cheers."

"Go on," said the chairman. "You have twelve minutes more."

I draw a veil.

I have the strongest objection to the attitude, not of lecturers, who, I am persuaded, are walking advertisements for modesty, but of those who listen to them. "What I like about music," said a witty Frenchman, "are the pretty ladies who listen to it." What I dislike about lecturing is the admiring crowd which gazes up at one, wets an anxious pencil, and takes careful and voluminous note of all that issues from one's lips. If they only knew—to harp on the same subject—that the learning one displays may be no more than the scum upon a well of ignorance pure and undefiled.

The other day, as I was proceeding to deliver a lecture, I picked up in my tube compartment a notebook left behind by one of those earnest seekers after self-improvement. In the mind's-eye I see the forgetful fellow : a tall, pale youth, with black spectacles, and hair tumbling wanly over a wrinkled forehead. He is an only son, of a morose disposition though kind to his mother and sisters, and spends his evenings playing draughts with the local scoutmaster. And yet his book abashed me. It was composed of Questions in General Knowledge. The first page bore the warning : "Somewhere in the following lists you will probably break down. This will show what side of your intellectual equipment is defective."

There were twelve tests in all, each containing twelve questions. In my own mind I got through the first, dealing with the Old Testament, satisfactorily enough till I came to the question, "Who was Esther?" And I confess, to my shame, that answer had I none. "History" found me out earlier. The second question was "Who were the Huguenots and how did they come by that name?" The third demanded to know whom the Thirty Years' War was between, why it began and how it ended. The fourth suggested that I should say *exactly* who and what were Judas Maccabæus, Pizarro, Machiavelli, Charlemagne. (Vaguely—yes! But *exactly*, who indeed?) Test 3. "Where are the Straits of Magellan?" Echo answered "Where?" I knew who wrote all the books in Test 4, and created all the characters in Test 5. Test 6 wasn't so easy: "Who was Erasmus, and why did he write to Sir Thomas More?" I came through "Music" with flying colours. "Science" was another matter. Who were Burnbank, Koch, Gutenberg, and Faust? I didn't know, and I 'm afraid I didn't care. Ditto, ditto those "Business Men," Schwab and Wanamaker. "Great Men and Women of the World," Test 10, was easy: Cæsar, Grant, Confucius, Garibaldi, Peary, Cleopatra, Socrates, Dreyfus, Schiller, Livingstone, Venezelos, Penn—I had heard of all these.

"Miscellaneous" was plain sailing up to the demand to disclose what part of the ox the porterhouse steak comes from. The last test of all desired me to distinguish between syndicate and corporation, vice and crime, legal and equitable. I could only say of these what the convict said of his place of confinement: "Reminds me of 'ome; it 's so bloody different!"

Well, I delivered that lecture, and I frankly admit that it was not an unqualified success. I would launch myself into a purple passage, only to be brought up sharp with the thought: "You humbug! *Who were the Huguenots, and why?*" I would get well into the middle of a passage of intricate reasoning, only to falter at the whereabouts of the porterhouse steak. I longed to throw my wretched paper to the winds and implore my audience to exchange rôles. They could, perhaps, have told me who and what was Mr. Wanamaker.

Mingling with the crowd after the lecture, I heard one man say, "What d' yer think of 'im?" "Not much!" his friend replied; "wish I 'd been to hear the other bloke!" The Institution had had another lecture at the same hour, and I was curious enough to refer to the notice-board for my rival's subject. It was "The Accountancy of Chinese Railways."

It occurs to me consolingly that anybody who could lecture on that subject must be omniscient, and so free to discourse with unclouded mind. But I should just like to ask him, suddenly: "Who were the Huguenots, and why?"

THOSE SAILORS

Every one of us has his own emotional make-up. It is not the sadness but the joy of life which, to me, is the true pathos. The meanest flower that blows, a string of birds across the moon, a hill-side, a line in a poem, a bar of music, an intonation in a beautiful voice—these move me unaccountably to tears. But most I am affected by the sea, alike in nature and in art.

I visited a picture-show recently, and found one of the rooms full of seascapes. Round about me people, with " Chelsea " written all over them, were explaining that the pictures lacked air, rhythm, counterpoint, backswing, follow-through—the usual art critic's cant. But to my simple eyes here, all around me, was my sea. The sea in all its moods. The sea as I know it in a peddling, land-lubberly way—splashing angrily round Bradda Head, rolling majestically along the Welsh coast, creeping shyly into Devonshire coves. The sea, as I remember it when I was six—a composite recollection this, having to do with the taste of milk and gingerbread, and the way the sharp pebbles hurt one's toes. The sea, as I have read of it in Mr. Conrad's *Typhoon*, where the mood is beyond nature, like King Lear's. The sea of Swinburne's "A Channel Passage":

"Three glad hours, and it seemed not an hour of supreme and supernal joy,
Filled full with delight that revives in remembrance a sea-bird's heart in a boy."

The sea, finally, of another poet:

"Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
So long, and yearnéd up the cliffs to tell."

These lines occur in Stephen Phillips's "Marpessa," one of the world's exquisite things, whatever Messrs. Squire, Shanks, and Turner may say. Marpessa was beloved of the god Apollo and Idas, a humble mortal. Both tell her what she means to them, and Marpessa chooses. Now I have never quite believed that the sea's undelivered message has to do with human beauty which is of the body. If the sea concern itself with humanity at all, which I very much doubt, it must be to hymn human courage, which is of the spirit. The sea is itself a spirit in so far as it is not the expression in terms of matter of a mindless, chemical formula.

And besides, is not courage the one human quality of which the sea has knowledge? The sea knows nothing of man in his inessentials, cooped up in stale prisons disguised as floating hotels, whiling away his captivity with Bridge, poker, and taffrail flirtations. The sea's knowledge of man begins when his state is reduced to a plank, a yard of sail, a biscuit and a keg of water, when he himself is stripped to the naked elements of his soul.

One of the wisest of our essayists, William Hazlitt, has an illuminating passage upon the greatness of man. Greatness, he says in effect, is great power, producing great effects. Man must show greatness in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. . . . No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. . . . A Lord Mayor is hardly a great man. . . . Yet a great farce-writer may be a great man, for Molière was but a great farce-writer.

Applying this definition, I find nothing here which would deny greatness to those sailor-men who were saved from the *Trevessa*, or who perished out of sight of land. They had great power over themselves, and showed it in a way that has been blazoned all over the world. None has gainsaid or will ever gainsay the manner of their fortitude. They have not only fulfilled but enlarged the public idea. Their act does not end with the landing on those islands, but goes on for ever and ever.

On his next page, and for the only time throughout twelve volumes of over two and a half million words, Hazlitt is to be found obviously tripping. "Lord Nelson," he says, "was a great naval commander; but for myself, I have not much opinion of a seafaring life." Is it too much to fancy that when, on those Elysian shores, Hazlitt meets those stained and battered sailors who were not saved he will fall on his knees and recant? That, binding up those poor feet and tending those sores, he will be careful lest he add the smart of his own salt tears? That, holding with what obstinacy he may his old opinion of a seafaring life, he will come to think differently of seafarers?

A more exquisite writer has written finely of the death which catches people in mid-career, laying out vast projects and planning monstrous foundations, flushed with hope and their mouth full of boastful language. "Does not life go down with a better grace," asks Stevenson, "foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably straggling to an end in sandy deltas?"

Let me put it the other way round. Let me put it that those who know that their vast projects and monstrous foundations are at an end, whose faces are pale with despair and mouths empty of all save the comforting of others, who are conscious of a miserable end in a waste of waters and die without a plaint uttered—let me put it that these, too, are great men and heroes. "The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, the happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land." Let me rather consider that when the great sailor-spirit, now beyond shooting-power, sinks into the spiritual arms, he leaves behind him indissoluble clouds of human glory, and trumpets which shall blow for ever.

THE HORRORS OF THEATRE-GOING

The other day I chanced upon something which filled me with an unholy joy. It was an advertisement in one of our starchier morning journals, and ran as follows:

> WANTED.—Situation as footman or chauffeur-valet. Would go as young leading actor. Algernon Fitzwhiffle-bottom, 333A New Cut, S.E.

You will realize the delight with which I cut out and safe bestowed this advertisement, when I tell you that I was engaged, the same evening, to respond at a theatrical dinner party to the toast of "The Critics." The proposer of that toast, a rising young actor, thought fit to describe members of my profession as "rats for whom there is no poison," and it will be imagined that, fortified with my cutting, I showed no mercy to this West End Adonis of the crimped hair and knife-edge trousers. He "asked for it," and, if I may say so in all modesty, got it. Worms turn, and so, too, on occasion will the dramatic critic.

We are an ill-used race. We spend our lives hailing geese as swans, helping lame dogs over stiles, pretending that yonder withered beldam is as bewitching as she was forty years ago. And what do we get out of it? Obloquy! The actor has no use for criticism. He does not even want discriminate, tempered appreciation. He wants praise laid on with a trowel, and the scrapings from the trowel picked up and heaped on top. Say that he gives almost the best performance of Richard III. that you have ever seen in your life, and that you say so. Is he satisfied? No. He demands the categoric statement that he is as subtle as Irving and as powerful as Barry Sullivan, as magnificent as Mansfield and as all-compelling as Kean. If you do not imply that you consider him as good as all four put together you are a traitor to him and to his art. As well stab him in the back and be done with it!

But the quarrel between the actor and the critic is an old one, and there is no particular reason for dwelling on it to-day. My grievance is the horrid lot of those who are mewed up every evening from half-past eight till after eleven o'clock in some stuffy prison which pretends to be a Louis Quinze or a Louis Seize saloon. I am heartily sick of purple velvet stalls and pile carpets the colour of tomato soup, of gold ribbons and love-knots, of curtains which look like my mother's dinner-gowns of forty years ago! I am utterly weary of those gigantic young women who, stripped to the waist, paint enormous pictures on easels erected round the chandelier, of those rose-bellied and pink-buttocked amours trafficking on the ceiling.

Every evening at seven o'clock I am conscious of a chill at the heart. I must dress, and at once arises the old, familiar question: Will last night's shirt "do" again? (A piece of soft indiarubber will work wonders with a thumb-mark, and it is a poor penknife which cannot cope with an egg-stain.) And in that shirt, or its fellow, the thinnest of dress-suits, and what is by courtesy a "great-coat," I shiver at the street-corner till my 'bus comes along. It is a wet night, and I must go on top. I arrive at the theatre looking like a rat which, in the absence of an effective poison, has tried drowning and made a mess of it.

Next I must fight my way to a cubby-hole, six feet by four, where a supercilious damsel disdainfully handles my dripping gear and endeavours to say, "Sixpence, please," without swallowing the pins with which her mouth is full. A still more scornful young woman, knowing me to be only the Press, indicates that my seat is in the middle of the back row. She mulcts me to the tune of sixpence for what she is pleased to call a programme. Or in those theatres where the bill of the play is free, she thrusts it into my hand with less graciousness than she would use in giving a dog a bone.

I take my seat, and my attention is at once subject to three distractions which prevent me from finding out the scene of the action, the period and the names of the actors. First the band strikes up one of those immitigable horrors—the " Dances from Henry VIII." Then the young woman in the pit immediately behind me breathes down the back of my neck the information that Miss Marion Terry, who has just entered one of the boxes, is " darling Ellen," and that the great comedienne now entering the stalls, whom I know as Miss Lottie Venne, is " dear Connie Ediss." Other people, unknown to me, are hailed as Lulu Lollipop, late of the Magnolia Theatre, and Babs Tootle, from the recent revue, *Spank Me !*

But the most annoying distraction of all is the programme itself. Information appertaining to the play is so overlaid with anecdotes, storyettes, confessions, characters from handwriting, hints as to the dispersal of wrinkles, superfluous hair and tissues, varicose veins, parasites, etc., etc., that I have to read every word of this nauseating rubbish lest I miss the title of what is presently to be performed. Ah ! here it is : " *Bullock's Heart* : a New Farcical Comedy in Three Acts." I look at my watch. I have been warned to be in my seat by 8.15 sharp, as " the interest of the play begins with the rise of the curtain." It is 8.30, and the stalls are three-parts filled. We wait another ten minutes for the first batch of late-comers to get comfortably settled, and then the play, and with it, I must suppose, the interest, begin.

In the interval I move about, harassed on all sides by the Army of Fashionable First-Nighters, who come not to see but to be seen. What a crew! They take not the slightest interest in the drama, and are never on view at unfashionable Hampstead or in the Waterloo Road. The Everyman Theatre and the "Old Vic" concern them not. They are worms which batten upon the dead body of the British Drama.

The play over, I take part in a free-fight at the above-mentioned cubby-hole. I put on my overcoat, damp and of unrecognizable shape. Finally I emerge, only to find that it is ten minutes past eleven, and the pubs are closed. This, I realize, will happen all over again to-morrow

And to think that, as a small boy, I would willingly spend the day at the dentist's, with a promise of "the theatre" in the evening!

A PRIVATE SHOW

Recently, during a golfing holiday, I received a handsome *brochure* entitled *Why Men Go Wrong*. Accompanying it was a polite notification from the Film Company concerned that if I cared to see this "picture" they would be pleased to run it off for me in their private theatre.

These booklets are not, I fancy, intended for the general public. They are sent out by the film-renting houses to the exhibitors, and declare, with all the "punch" of which the American language is capable, the peculiar, unparalleled, and unimaginable drawing power of the films which they illustrate. There is no pretence that these are not puffs pure and simple, naked and proud of it. "A Sound Paybox Picture," says the cover, echoing a principle which His Honour Judge Parry has so often laid down in the court of aesthetics.

The fly-leaf of this particular booklet informs me that *Why Men Go Wrong* is a title which "arouses that curiosity which pulls patronage." I agree. There must be thousands of little "tweenies" who have wondered why men will be wicked, and have searched their dream-books in vain. When the film is due the exhibitor will doubtless "bill big," as he is enjoined to do, and every little housemaid in London will spend her "night out" in hoped-for ecstasies of shuddering revelation. But she will be disappointed, poor dear. The *Family Herald* made the reason plain as soon as she could lisp its numbers.

"The Story," my booklet goes on, "is written by the Star." Fancy being urged to the Lyceum on the grounds that the play is by Sir Henry Irving! "The production has received the Star's personal direction." Just to make sure, I suppose, that nobody else ever gets within a couple of yards of the screen-centre. Then follows a synopsis of the story.

The Marquis de Loro is a wealthy French nobleman, "with whom the nobility of honest labour counts for more than aristocratic birth." He is engaged to Isabel, "whose home is the scene of licentious and debauched revelry." We know the kind of woman Isabel is from the fact that whenever de Loro is announced she rises from a couch of leopard-skin and her morning champagne to seek her private oratory, there to be discovered in communion with a priest. She has a "consuming passion," but it is for Bernard, de Loro's young friend. Bernard repulses Isabel, who, " like Potiphar's wife, plans for his downfall."

But de Loro has a neighbour, the Marquis d'Alt, who, being in financial difficulties, resolves to marry his daughter Marie to Camillo, "a wealthy but dissolute banker." The wedding takes place, but " on the wedding night, owing to the brutality of Camillo, Marie returns home to her father, and when de Loro hears of this he hastens to d'Alt's assistance, and, by purchasing his mansion, saves him from threatened ruin."

I shall not pursue the story in detail. The reader knows as well as I that de Loro must kill Bernard, whom he loves better than a brother, that he must cast off Isabel, subsequently plunge into whirlpools and vortices of dissipation, finally and cynically espouse the now divorced Marie. It is the normal thing in film drama for wealthy French nobles to have their uninsured château destroyed by fire, and for themselves to be reduced from opulence to beggary in the twinkling of a sub-title. It is the normal thing for the lily-wife to scrape together 700,000 francs, part of which she borrows from her divorced husband's second wife, " an old school chum." It is normal for her to be suspected of infidelity and maltreated, and finally to lose her reason, whilst her tyrant, " aged by sorrow and remorse, wanders aimlessly round the estate" until, towards the end of the sixth reel, it is time for reconciliation and the lights of apotheosis.

My booklet declared all this to constitute a "thought-provoking drama." Reading it, I was provoked to no conclusions other than that not even Miss Dell has written anything quite so devastatingly silly—though the horse-whipping to which de Loro subjects Marie is in that writer's merriest vein—and that there are no actors living who, on the stage proper, could "put over" anything quite so abjectly drivelling. And then I determined on my return to London to accept the invitation to see this picture run off at a private show.

The theatre turned out to be a small room, some sixteen feet square, up four flights of stairs. I imagine that I was in the worst possible mood for receptivity. My mind was still full of sea and sky and sand, principally the sand of the bunkers on the coast of Norfolk. The day was gloriously fine, and here was I cooped up at eleven o'clock in the morning in a Soho rabbit-hutch, with a chair to sit upon, a screen to look at, and darkness, material, moral, and intellectual, around and engulfing me. There had been no gorgeous threshold to put one in the romantic mood; there was, of course, no helpful music, nor any sense of making one of a corporate audience. (The influence of the mass upon the individual is considerable. How else explain the power of the parson to "put over" to a congregation matter which he would not offer to a child reasoning alone?)

Will it be believed that I was held by this arrant rubbish? Not "got," perhaps—as the pamphlet indicated I must be, unless, of course, I was mentally deficient—but held. That is, the hour passed like ten minutes.

Can the explanation be that I am a lover of good acting, and that Severin Mars proved himself in this picture to be a very fine actor indeed? He had one gesture just before the stabbing of Bernard which Irving would certainly have used. The boy had struck Isabel on the mouth, and de Loro, just before he kills the young man, taps him on the lip with slow and subtle promise of doom. Can it be that the scene was obviously laid in Provence, which I know like the back of my hand? No, I do not think either of these explanations will do.

The plain fact is that I get a childish pleasure out of almost any picture. *And there must be thousands like me!* In book-form *Why Men Go Wrong* would be pitched across my room in less than ten minutes; I should probably not sit out the first act of it performed on a real stage by living actors. Of course, I enjoy a sane picture better than an insane one, or I hope I do. But an insane one will serve.

It is very sad, but there it is. My booklet is justified ; this is a "Sound Paybox Picture." I might conceivably put down money to see it.

I went out to lunch and then *came back and saw some more films* ! One entitled *The Tents of Allah* attracted me particularly. Not long ago I heard an eminent actor declaim all that passage in *The Tempest* about the "cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces," etc. Well, Mr. Ainley conjured up no vision to compare with these photographic minarets and cupolas. "Show it me!" said the Yorkshireman. The screen can show some wonderful *bona fides.*

The moral ? The moral is that an enormous responsibility rests with the producers of the films. The fact that I, an average member of an average audience, will swallow anything which producers care to put before me, should make them peculiarly careful in their purveying.

But does it ?

A DAY IN MAY

I HAD spent the previous evening reading the Confessions of a Self-made Magnate. They were not confessions, it seemed to me, but boasts. You have only got to will a thing sufficiently hard, the author said, and you can be what you want. If you are fond of star-gazing you can, by an effort of will, become Astronomer Royal ; if you are good at Bullets, you can force them to make you Poet Laureate. And this although the present occupants of these posts are in excellent health. The Magnate's own Secret had been to cram forty-eight hours' work into every twenty-four. Now, I know all about work—the only pleasure I have ever got out of it has been in retrospect—whereas the fun in cramming forty-eight hours' pleasure into a single day lies obviously in the cramming. As I lay in bed reading my morning's bills I knew that I had earned a holiday. I had put "Finis" to a new book the night before, and every author knows what that means. How did the "Arrangements for To-day" column propose that I should amuse myself?

The Private View at the Academy? Silk hat and check trousers, spats, tight boots, lemon-coloured gloves—wot 'opes! as Tommy used to say. A matinée in aid of "Our Dumb Friends' League"? (Mental note: Admirable object; some other day!) A lecture on "The Origins of the Conceptions of Isotopes"? (What's Isotopes? A racehorse by Isonomy out of Topaz?) Another lecture: "Tunisia To-day"? (Let Tunisia stay where it is!) The House of Commons? The Zoo? The annual demonstration of the Primrose League? (Some other year!) No, none of these suited my mood. I tore up my bills, and half an hour later, wearing my oldest golf-jacket and some nondescript trousers, descended into the garden—of which I and the other square-dwellers rent one-sixtieth part each—with a play of Shakespeare's, picked at random, under my arm.

It was ten o'clock and the garden deserted, so I could choose the best thorn tree. Beneath that fragrant roof I opened my book at the words:

> "Fear no more the heat o' the sun."

And there, under the shade of that thorn, I read yet again the dirge of Cymbeline's sons over the body of their foe. That which moves me in this poem is not so much the famous couplet:

> "Golden lads and girls all must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust,"

as the soul-shaking

> "To thee the reed is as the oak."

I closed the book and meditated. I meditated first that the man who reads poetry all the year round is generally an ass, and second, that the man who never reads poetry is certainly a fool.

At noon I sauntered out and bullied my banker to the tune of fifty shillings, grudgingly conceded on the representation of certain emoluments accruing from the profession of letters in exactly twenty-eight days. It was the fourth of the month. "All the rest have thirty-one," and May, alas! is one of the rest. First of all I "invested" five shillings on Cos to win the One Thousand Guineas. Then I considered lunch. Now, it is no use going a buster unless it is a buster that you go. So, still dressed like a tramp, I marched into the West End's most exclusive restaurant, ordered from some obsequious Italian count a meal to make a Hyde Park orator foam at the mouth, chiefly pâté de foie gras and asparagus, with iced hock, the one good thing that Germany has given the world except Beethoven's symphonies, Wagner's operas, and Heine's poems. I spent the subsequent hour at full length on the grass in the Green Park, taking a gentle stroll towards the railings and the shouting newsboys at about a quarter to three.

(Tranquil had won, of course, not Cos.) From three to five I watched some children at play, debated whether there was really such a delicious person as Mr. Lewis Hind's Julius Cæsar, decided that there was, and marvelled at the power of art which can make such a roguish little four-year-old and such a woman as Imogen come to life by a few strokes upon paper.

At six I crossed over to Hyde Park via a tea-shop. From seven to nine I listened to the band. From ten to eleven I drank beer in bulk. At eleven-thirty I supped at a coffee-stall, choosing a modest one to suit my old clothes. At twelve I was in bed, unclothed except as to pyjamas, but in my right mind and minus fifty shillings.

IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

All self-respecting essays have a beginning, a middle, and an end. This one won't. Like some lives which have no beginning to speak of, no noticeable middle, and nothing you would call an end, this little screed will just ramble along until it is time to call a halt. Something after the fashion of last Sunday afternoon. Just as I was wondering whether the remains of Saturday's supper-party—I had had friends to Bridge—would coldly furnish forth the Sunday dinner, my telephone bell rang. A friend—one of the few remaining to me from the happy days before I was a journalist—desired that I would take luncheon with him at one of those palatial hostelries not a thousand miles from Kensington.

Now the idea of lunching off purple pile, sage-coloured tapestries and gold chairs, of handling exquisite glass and silver, of seeing foreign waiters tipped till they bump the aforesaid pile with their foreheads—this magnificence enchants me. More so when the alternative is stale chicken sandwiches and sour claret-cup. I accepted.

"What now?" asked my friend, whom I will call George, after the sumptuous head waiter had nearly broken his back in obeisance.

"We will," I said, "take the air in Kensington Gardens."

First we sought out Peter Pan and made homage to the little fellow. "Pipe, happy sheep-boy, Love," I murmured, "pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone!"

"Stout fellow, Wordsworth!" said George.

Next we struck the Round Pond. Is there anything so impossibly, heart-searchingly romantic as a toy boat? George informed me that something he called a pinnace must be doing at least eight knots.

Next we had a look at Watts's "Physical Energy," that sexless beast with a stallion's neck, club feet, broken back, and stance unknown to any stud groom. George had a long yarn here how Tishy ought to have won the Derby.

A glance now at the statue of William of Orange, which stands outside the Palace. I know little of this foreign prince, who was to become an English king, beyond the fact that four days after his ally, Charles, had patched up peace with French Louis, he attacked the army of the Duke of Luxembourg at Mons. And, further, that he sanctioned that most treacherous of all massacres—Glencoe. Still, ugly fellow though he was, I do not believe him to have been quite so graceless, and pompous withal, as this statue. But the point to be insisted upon here is the inscription, plain for all the world to see :

WILLIAM III.
OF ORANGE
KING OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND 1650–1702
PRESENTED BY WILLIAM II.
GERMAN EMPEROR AND KING OF
PRUSSIA TO KING EDWARD VII. FOR
THE BRITISH NATION 1907.

" How long after August 1914 would German William have respected a statue presented by King Edward ? " I asked.

" Low fellow, William ! " said George.

And now we sought chairs, and began to talk philosophy, in which science George dabbles a little. He was explaining to me how the First Cause may have made in Man a creature more gifted than It bargained for.

" Like a watch," he explained. " Man makes a watch, which then does something which Man cannot do for himself. Tells him the time."

And he fell to describing the mechanical construction of the universe, drawing neat little figures in the gravel with his stick. At this point three little unmechanical figures appeared from nowhere, three little Peter Pans with adorable gold curls and brown holland " pinnies."

" Did you ever fall off a motor-bike ? " asked the tallest. I replied with dignity that when I was in the army I fell off a horse several times.

'That 's nothing ! " said the budding engineer. " Did you ever fall off a motor-bike ? "

I felt exactly as David Copperfield did when he confessed to the driver of the coach that he had never bred Suffolk Punches. However, George and I made some show of conversation, though as we neither of us possessed a motor-bike, as, we gathered, did Uncle Robert, we felt we were pretty small beer.

The children told us that they were brothers, which we could see for ourselves. Two were twins, aged seven, the third was aged four. They were called Peter, Geoffrey, and John.

" Peter, James, and John," George corrected.

" No," said the middle one, " not James. My name 's Geoffrey. James is a horrid name."

I agreed.

" Are you twins ? " asked Peter.

" Heaven forfend ! " said George, who can be absurdly stilted.

Children are like very clever grown-ups—they can begin an acquaintance where ordinary people leave off. They told us everything about father and mother, themselves and nurse. Nurse, by the railings, was talking to a handsome young giant in the Coldstream

Guards. They explained that this was nurse's brother. When we got up to go George said :

" Mind you tell your mother how you talked to two nice gentlemen in the gardens ! "

We had got a little way when we heard feet pattering behind us—they belonged to John, aged four.

" Will you tell your mother," this young gentleman demanded, " how you talked to three nice little boys ? "

We said we would.

" Promise ? "

" Promise ! "

" You were saying, George," I said, " that man is made on the model of a watch. Go on ! "

" Stow it ! " said George. " Let 's have tea."

BEER AND BOWLS

The other day I came across the following remarkable sentence : "That people in the slums should prefer beer to alabaster electric bowls is a truth too profound for the highbrow mind to grasp." I am not sure that the quotation is verbally correct, but that 's the gist of it. It was a sentence which set me thinking.

As it happens, I do not live in a slum. I live in a street of utmost respectability. From the window of my ground-floor flat I could see the British Museum if it wasn't, as the song says, for the houses in between. I dare not throw a stone for fear of hitting the Foundling Hospital. Half a dozen doors away Charles Dickens lived, and near by, too, lived Disraeli. It is true that there are a mews and a horse-dealer's yard just over the way. But the owner of the flat above mine keeps a six-cylinder car, which stands at my door for hours and gives the street a compensating "tone." In fact, the whole neighbourhood is posh. It may be that the upper classes do not know what that last word means—so much the worse for the upper classes ! In a way I am sorry for them—addle-pates betaking their gout and distemper from watering-place to spa, and spa to watering-place. Whenever I think of our hereditary ruling classes my mind goes back to that saying of a caustic Prime Minister anent a colleague who shall be nameless, " Poor X——, if he had a few more brains he 'd be half-witted."

But I have strayed from my point, which was alabaster bowls and beer. As it happens, and I set it down thanking God, I am in a position to enjoy both. I possess a hanging alabaster lamp of great softness and beauty—which cost me the whole of three pounds—and as soon as I have finished this essay I shall go out and drink beer. And a lot of beer, too. Not three pounds' worth, perhaps, but still quite a lot. Now suppose that I could not afford both ? Which of the two bowls, think you, should I resign ? The one shedding the outward radiance, or the one providing the inward glow ? Which would I forfeit the more easily—the lamp and all that goes with it, pictures by masters picked up as bargains, piano of exquisite make (on the hire-purchase system), statuary (one genuine bronze and one equally genuine papier-mâché), and corner cupboard full of knick-knacks and china, or the solid comfort and companionship of the corner-pub ? There can be no doubt in my mind as to which I should choose. " Take all, take everything," I should cry, " but leave me the privilege of saying to the blushful Hebe, 'Same again, miss, please!'" Only I would not give up my books. The Sheraton cases might go, but the books must remain. After all, what is the floor for? And, to my way of thinking, he who would decide otherwise is that meanest of creatures—the æsthete.

But there is a class meaner even than that effeminate one which prefers works of art to the work of God, which puts pots above people and art-china above talk round an inn fire. These are the Snobs, the folk who do not so much enjoy their pretty things as the knowledge that they possess them, and the envy which they believe that possession to arouse in Mrs. Smith's bosom over the way. They do not like Mrs. Smith, they do not respect her, but they want her to know that they keep better pictures, put their servants into handsomer liveries, and have one more course "to" their dinners than she and her husband can afford. But let Mrs. Smith come by a title, and what a change in the Snob's attitude! You may know the Snob by this, that he can look no man in the face from an equal level. Either he condescends from the altitudes of a ten-pound-a-year higher rental, an extra flunkey and higher-power car, or he grovels. The Snob is a mean creature who knows no mean station; he must be a-tiptoe or on his belly.

It is a mistake to think the breed is extinct. Soon after the advent of the new Government one of our aristocratic weeklies devoted a two-column leading article to the boots of the Front Bench members, ridiculing their stout soles and homely toecaps. "Paint the soul," said Browning; "never mind the legs and arms!" It seems to me that our more honourable concern is in what may be in our legislators' heads rather than on their feet. But your Snob knows nothing of interior furnishings, and is all for an outward show.

Any doubt as to the persistence of snobbery may be dispelled by a glance at the advertisement columns of our more expensive dailies. There you may read with fair frequency some such items as

> LADY OF RANK, moving in exclusive circles, would undertake chaperonage for a season. Highest references required.

But nothing is said about the references given. The rank is the guinea-stamp, it would appear, to be taken at its face value. *But do these high-born dames get paid?* Further, if this matter of chaperonage has real moral sanction behind it as well as the social convenience, surely we should see in the *Poplar Guardian* some such notification as

> CHARLADY, disengaged evenings, well known in East End circles, will keep eye on young lady attending local Palais de Danse. One eye 2s. 6d. per night, both eyes 5s.

Then there is the

LADY OF TITLE, with car, wishes to take paying guest for London season. 20 guineas weekly inclusive.

Whereas I look in vain for

GREENGROCER'S WIDOW, with cart, wishes to take in small family any old time. Corner of well-appointed bed-sitting vacant, near window.

I find the same kind of thing in the fashionable intelligence:

MR. AND MRS. HARBOTTLE POUNDISH have left Farthings, Top Drawer, Hants, and are staying at the Magnolia Hotel.

or

MISS DIMITY CHINTZ has recovered from her indisposition of yesterday, and hopes to be at the *thé dansant* at Bounder's Hotel this afternoon.

I am sorry that these do not move me. I should be more interested to hear that

BILL NOGGS has recovered from the trifling accident which occurred last night shortly before closing time. He will attend in the private bar of the Clutch and Spanner shortly after 5 P.M. to-day, when he will be prepared to kiss and be friends.

But the Nobs and Snobs do not understand this kind of thing. They prefer to sit at home under their alabaster bowls hugging their alabaster souls.

CRICKET IN THE 'FORTIES

PERHAPS the most popular print ever engraved is Mason's *Cricket Match between Sussex and Kent.* This was published on May 1, 1849, at 80 King's Road, Brighton, and was dedicated to His Royal Highness Prince Albert. The painters of the picture were William Drummond and Charles Basébe; the engraver was George Henry Phillips. Every cricketer knows this print, copies of which hang in the pavilion at Lord's, the Oval, Nottingham, Manchester, and in innumerable small club-houses. It represents a view of Brighton. In the far distance, centre, is St. Peter's Church, with Hanover Crescent and the South Down to our left. To our right are St. Nicholas' Church, Brighton Terminus, and Hodson's Mill. In the middle distance a cricket-match —Sussex *v.* Kent—is in progress. Kent are batting, and Fuller Pilch is preparing to receive the ball from Lillywhite. In the foreground are some sixty-six cricket celebrities of the time, and a cat. A little *brochure* has just been published (*The Story of a Cricket Picture*, by the late Alfred D. Taylor), giving biographical sketches of all these famous men, with one exception.

There is a great deal to be said about this picture, which is to be met with all over the English-speaking world, in Canada and Australia and, curiously enough, in Holland. After the first impression the copper plate was rested for some thirty years, during which several spurious imitations appeared. Over my desk hangs a colour-print which was one of my father's cherished possessions as a boy. It is described as "Painted by J. Jarvis, engraved by G. Reeves, and published by R. Jarvis of Covent Garden." Only it is dated 1836 whereas the original bears the impression 1849. This is surely what the Frenchman called *trop de zèle*.

Well may Alfred Taylor have called this imitation "a gem." I have compared it very closely indeed with the original and failed to find the smallest difference. Even the cat has the same headless appearance.

I suppose I look at the print unthinkingly fifty times a day, and thinkingly at least once a fortnight. It takes me back to the time of which my father, who was a Sussex man and once saw Fuller Pilch, had fair recollection. The first thing one notices, apart from the top-hats, are the costumes of the umpires—frock-coats, stocks, and elaborate white waistcoats. He at

Lillywhite's end, William Henry Caldecourt, has the pose of a Disraeli addressing the House. Then it strikes you that the players are all men of middle age, and lastly you notice that batsmen and wicket-keeper alike scorn pads and gloves. Yet the round-arm bowling, first introduced in 1828, must have been a thing to be feared on the dangerous, bumpy wicket. There are no sight-screens, and no boundaries. In those days every hit was run out, and the crowd parted to allow the outfield to retrieve the ball. On the subject of the top-hat Taylor writes amusingly:

> "They rarely became dislodged. I have lived on the Brighton Front for over forty years, yet never saw a topper at the mercy of the winds, though every other kind of head-gear surrenders to Nature's force—even tight-fitting caps. I once asked an old coachman if his hat had ever been removed by Zephyr's breeze. Yes—once. The day the *Euridice* foundered. Even then it was hit probably by a wind-driven article. Once removed it mounted high; far above the Grand. It was returned to him two months later from somewhere in mid-Sussex, his name being printed thereon. This is gospel; Mr. Robinson, of Hove, will bear me out. One thing, they could be removed gracefully when acknowledging the plaudits of the crowd, which is more than can be said of the present-day cricket cap. There used to be a special law embedded in the code, 'Hat knocked on wicket,' but I doubt whether this mode of dismissal occurred more than half a dozen times during the period

of the tall hat's popularity. Huntsmen and undertakers use them to this day. For the former to finish an event *minus* head covering would spell disqualification. The man is not living who has witnessed an undertaker's hat blow off. Such calamity would bankrupt his business."

Every cricketer will, at first sight of this picture, at once fall to examining the field. It consists of bowler, wicket-keeper, and long-stop, slip and deep third-man, point, with cover-point to his left in the direction of the slips—the position assigned to him by Frederick Gale in the case of fast bowling—mid-off and mid-on, short and long leg. It is obviously going to be a fine day, the ground looks fast, there are no outfields, and the Kent batsmen are going to stay in till late in the afternoon—a feat in those days when the wicket was so bumpy that long-stop used to wear a silk scarf round his right knee to enable him to drop without damage to his flannels. Even then his chest became black and blue, and altogether long-stop was the most important man in the field, the wicket-keeper being content to leave all balls noticeably wide of the wicket to his subordinate.

The peculiar delight of this little book is its assumption that cricket is the chief occupation of mankind. Its author is said never to have taken part in any game of cricket, " even of the smallest note," thus proving once more that it is not necessarily the expert at a sport who gets the most fun out of it. Only the most whole-hearted, fanatical enthusiasm could have discovered the names and fathomed the histories of all save one of those persons represented in the foreground of this picture. What a roll they are! I shall have space for no more than a glance at this nursery of English cricket.

First, of course, is Alfred Mynn, who stood over six feet one inch, lived on roast beef and beer for dinner, and roast pork and beer for supper, and trained to eighteen stone. This great cricketer had a giant's strength and a child-like heart, and is the greatest name in cricket till we come to W. G. Grace. Prowse's poem ending

> "Proudly, sadly we will name him, to forget him were a sin—
> Lightly lie the turf upon thee, kind and manly Alfred Mynn,"

will be remembered for so long as cricket endures. Fuller Pilch was a finer batsman than Mynn, whose prowess, perhaps, was greatest as a bowler. It is to Pilch that we owe the art, theory, and practice of forward play, and he was one of the greatest coaches the game has known. Wisden is a boy at this date, and is seen peering over the shoulders of a group of autocrats of the game. Then there is Box, an Adonis till his nose was smashed at Lord's and the best wicket-keeper until Pilling came along, and Dark, "a self-made man, but fully deserving the prefix 'Mr.,' though generally regarded as a pro." Dark, of course, was the head of the firm of bat and ball makers, and left £30,000. Lillywhite, in the opinion of our biographer, was probably the greatest bowler who ever lived, although he slyly admits the possibility of Wilfrid Rhodes disagreeing. Mr. Nicholas Felix—whose surname, the unpronounceable one of Wanostracht, was dropped at his own request—was tutor, singer, inventor, linguist, musician, author, and painter. Was it not Whistler who, on hearing a list of Leighton's accomplishments, stammered, "P—p—paints a little, too"? So Felix may be said to have played a little cricket as well. One of his drives went ninety-eight yards before it pitched, and then rolled another seventy-five. Of Mr. Hamblin Smith as a cricketer our author has no record. He is standing near the margin of the picture and in close proximity to the refreshment bar. Is he the mathematical genius of that name, or a forbear? In any case he should know that two and two make four.

Let our author describe the great William Ward in his own words:

"Sitting like Napoleon after Waterloo, with tortured brow and lost in a sublime immensity of cogitation, taking no notice of anything, not even the cat—if it *is* a cat . . .

" Was a very powerful hitter, and is recorded to have always used a bat weighing 4 lbs. From the year 1816 to about 1828 he made some tremendous scores; his best being 278, which he compiled at Lord's in 1820, when he was at the wicket for the greater part of three days. Although the world is one hundred years older, it is somewhat curious that this score has never been excelled on the St. John's Wood enclosure. He continued playing until he was sixty years of age, and the good work he accomplished on behalf of Hampshire and the M.C.C. cannot be estimated. . . .

" He was once engaged in a game of cards which was commenced on a Monday and continued until Wednesday morning, and then only was terminated to permit Coombe (of brewing renown) to attend a funeral."

My space is running out, but there must be a word for George Brown, the scorer in this match, said to be the greatest bowler the world has ever seen, faster even than Kortright. His bowling was so terrific that the fieldsmen were nearly all placed behind the wicket. He stood over six feet two inches, weighed eighteen stone, and is reputed to have killed a dog at Lord's after bowling through a man's coat. Of the Mystery Man, a prominent figure in the very middle of the picture, Taylor was unable, to his immense chagrin, to discover anything. Was it Mason himself, the publisher of the print? Was it a Mr. Langdon, who had recently been ordained, and who might have objected to his identity being revealed? The point is not decided. But what is one failure among some sixty or seventy successes?

. . . IN THE 'SEVENTIES

When I was a boy they used to publish, I think about Christmas-time, a small annual dealing with the summer's cricket. It wore, if I remember rightly, a binding of yellow paper, and went by the formidable title of *John and James Lillywhite's Cricketer's Companion with which is incorporated Lillywhite's Guide to Cricketers.* I last remember seeing a copy round about the year 1887. Do they publish this book now? I should doubt it. Cricket was a more aristocratic sport then; the evening newspapers had not reduced it to their own chattersome level; there was room for a yearly gossip. Cricket to-day means in the popular mind county cricket and little else; to John and James Lillywhite it meant the game of the public school and university, of the M.C.C. and of such wandering clubs as I Zingari, Incogniti, Gentlemen of Yorkshire, Harrow Wanderers, Uppingham Rovers, Assyrians, Revellers, Rossall Rangers. The status of county cricket may be gathered from a sentence which occurs in an account of the presentation of a testimonial to Mr. W. G. Grace in July 1879:

> "It is generally understood that we shall see but little of him in the future, except, perhaps, in County and Gentleman *v.* Players matches."

I cull this from an old volume, picked up in a second-hand bookshop, in which the years 1880–1–2 had been bound together. But, to tell the truth, cricket in those years seems to have been faintly snobbish. Thus we read in a review of the county season of 1879 by "a Light Blue Captain":

> "There is now no need to justify an article on county cricket: the undoubted popularity of county matches is a matter of notoriety in all cricketing circles. If facts were needed to prove this assertion, such an one as this might be brought forward, viz. that old and distinguished clubs like the I Zingari, a club which can offer to its members not only first-rate cricket, but cricket with an *entourage* of delightful society at the most beautiful country seats, find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to place representative elevens in the field, owing to the claims made upon the patriotism of the members by their respective counties. We may or may not ascribe this lively patriotism to the existence of a Conservative Government, or to the prevalence among cricketers of Conservative opinions. . . ."

And again, in an article on "Cricket Management," by Frederick Gale, we read:

> "It is too much in these days—when in ordinary life the three tailors of Tooley Street meet in a public-house and

pass resolutions to abolish the Upper House, and send their resolution to their County Members—to hope to establish a first and second eleven in any club. Always give the muffs and fogeys a turn in an opening match and in a wind-up match—they like being asked; and if you can induce the comic fogey to come, he will draw a lot more; and on occasions of this kind, don't give them anything second-rate. Be punctual yourselves, handicap the best players fairly, and play your best cricket, and some of the muffs or fogeys are sure to make a good hit or catch, which will last them till next season; and remember that the axis on which the real cricket world turns is good fellowship and kindness, and though the fogey and the muff's guinea or two are valuable to the club, their good will is above price."

One agrees; what one doesn't understand is how the best players are to be "handicapped fairly."

The occasion of the testimonial to Grace reads curiously in the light of his completed career. In 1879, after playing through sixteen consecutive seasons, Grace had completed 415 innings in first-class matches, and obtained in all 20,842 runs, giving an average of 50·92 runs per innings. During this period he took 1349 wickets at an average cost of 13 runs per wicket. He had played 51 innings of three figures in first-class matches, with an aggregate of 9411 runs and an average per innings of 184·27. Statistics mean very little, or at least they do not produce on the reader the same shock as a more personal view of the matter. Let me reflect, then, that when these figures were compiled I was not two years old, and that when I was well on into manhood the veteran was still the wonder of his age. All that Grace lacked of success was a poet to immortalize him. If ever Time toiled and panted after any man, that man was "W. G."

But to go back to our snobbishness. The Hon. R. H. Lyttelton writes :

> "Englishmen know now how strong the Australians are, and if they wish to consult their own pleasure and the reputation of English amateurs they will not care to go out, except with a good all-round team. This they are never likely to get. Mr. I. D. Walker and Lord Harris tried their best to do so, but at the end they were compelled to enlist the services of two professionals, owing to their being unable to get bowlers from the ranks of the gentlemen, and where such excellent cricketers failed it is possible that others will fail also. *Besides, mixed elevens of amateurs and professionals do not as a rule answer as regards English cricketers.* I still believe that the best amateur eleven would beat the strongest eleven in Australia, but it requires the best, and that we are not likely to be able to muster. . . ."

The italics are mine. Cricket has fallen upon what this writer would probably have considered evil days. But even then what was probably considered the vulgar assiduity of the Australians was noted :

> "Our cousins have come and gone, and have left behind them a lesson for us which all England should never forget, and it is simply this, viz. they came on to a village green

> within ten miles of London, and for four days practised from eleven o'clock till five, with an hour's interval for luncheon; and that practice was timed by the watch, every man having his quarter-of-an-hour's drill at batting and bowling, and the rest were fielding the whole time. The round for the whole eleven, each man batting fifteen minutes, occupied nearly three hours, and during all the practice there was no chattering in the field—it was pure business. I hope never to see the day when Australia will beat the best eleven gentlemen of England two matches out of three, and I never expect to, as I have the most unbounded confidence in English chivalry and unselfishness in a national contest."

To-day one would not like to back the eleven best English amateurs against the Australians and allow them three innings instead of two!

Lawn tennis in 1881 was already threatening cricket, and our authors are of the opinion that

> "the *morale* of an eleven is certainly not improved by the playing of the younger game on the outskirts of the ground, and an unfortunate batsman who solaces himself behind the tennis net will hardly be as energetic in the field as his captain could wish. Lawn tennis affords very pleasant recreation of a mild type, but it is best played at some distance from the scene of a cricket match."

The perfection of modern wickets is deplored, and a ball of Walter Mynn's is cited which went from the pitch at one bound clean into the long-stop's hands. In these days cricket approximated undeniably to the definition of it given by M. Taine:

> " A hard ball is hurled at a man with a bat *avec une vélocité terrible.*"

These were the days of the late cut, an exquisite stroke no longer to be seen. " Faint heart never won fair lady," quotes the Hon. R. H. Lyttelton, but he adds that " as no lady is so fair as this cut, no batsman should hesitate to run the risk of a catch at slip for such a prize."

One wonders whether in these days of the true wicket and the " googly " the crowd knows what first-class cricket looked like forty years ago. Here is a description of it :

> " Nowadays a batsman will go in on a wicket so true that he will feel it disgraceful to be clean bowled. At both ends he will find a slow bowler ; massed upon the off side he will see about eight fieldsmen, and one man in a nondescript place somewhere about short-leg guarding the entire on side. Then begins the play, which frequently consists of the bowler tossing balls of every variety of length to the off side of the wicket, while the batsman deals with them according as contempt, fury, or caution prevail in his mind. On the majority of county grounds (though we must in all haste except the Trent Bridge at Nottingham) a shooter is almost an unknown ball ; not equally rare, but still very uncommon, is a half-volley to leg—so uncommon, indeed, that when it is bowled it is very rarely hit, for any one by the time he has played two years in first-class matches, even if he was originally a good leg-hitter, from want of practice has lost the art."

The remarkable thing is that the modern batsman who gets plenty of practice with leg balls also seems to have lost the art of hitting to leg. But perhaps he is not "originally a good leg-hitter."

John and James had a wise taste in criticism and some talent for prophecy. What could be more comprehensively damning than their estimate of one Richards?

> "Richards—a very fast bowler—loses more runs in the field than he is ever likely to secure."

Young Abel they deemed "not destitute of promise."

. . . AND 'EIGHTIES

There were great men before Agamemnon, and great cricketers before Hobbs, Hitch, and Fender, though to listen to the London larrikin you would not think so. I suppose there must be many small boys now cheering Makepeace and Hallows, the Tyldesleys, Cook, and Parkin, who have never heard of the giants of my youth.

The enthuser over bygone glories is notoriously a bore in whom the truth is not; yet it is my deep conviction that Lancashire cricketers are not as good as they were. My actual recollections of the game begin at Old Trafford in 1884, though "Lillywhite," with his yellow cover and curious partiality for Lancashire, had instructed my early years as to our championship heritage.

Of the great eleven of 1881, I can recall A. N. Hornby, A. G. Steel, V. R. Royle, Barlow, Watson, Briggs, and Pilling. I am a bit hazy about dates, but there seems to me a considerable interval before we come to the Golden Age of Lancashire cricket, the age of A. C. MacLaren, Albert Ward, Frank Sugg, Mold, and Tyldesley. Which Tyldesley, does the reader ask? *The* Tyldesley! And I shall not bemean him by initials.

In those days schoolboys were divided into two camps—the supporters of the sombre, majestic Ward, and the shouters for this lighter-hearted newcomer of the late cut and the leg-glide. After these came the era of R. H. Spooner, Walter Brearley, and Jack Sharp, but by that time some of the glamour of King Willow had departed, and for me the brassie reigned in his stead.

I am inclined to think that a composite eleven containing A. N. Hornby, A. G. Steel, A. C. MacLaren, R. H. Spooner, Barlow, Ward, Tyldesley, Briggs, Mold, Sharp, and Pilling would have beaten any team which any other county could pick throughout thirty years. But then, as a Lancashire man, it is my duty to think so.

Soberly considered, my team contains nine batsmen, five bowlers, and only two rabbits at the crease. Let me admit that Barlow and Ward at the wicket together would have caused the spectators to steal back to their neglected businesses in the city. It is largely for this reason that I have included old man Hornby, who could always be trusted to run Barlow out when he looked like becoming a nuisance.

In those days Lancashire held her head pretty high, fearing only Yorkshire. We always were and always shall be afraid of the Broadacres. Just as at football Salford were ever a beaten team as soon as a Swinton jersey appeared on the field, so Lancashire, going in to bat against Yorkshire, have lost three wickets before the umpire has called "Play!" To this day I never read the papers during these encounters; the bare fact of defeat is as much as I can bear.

The Old Trafford season always began with the Whit-Monday match against the men of Kent. They were a gay side of amateurs, but it was really rather presumptuous of them to come so far for so little! I draw a veil over the gloom of the three last days in that week. Often I wonder whether the little boys in Yorkshire were as happy as we in Lancashire were miserable?

Notts were a hard nut to crack, though after we had got rid of Shrewsbury and Gunn the rest was plain sailing—a mixed metaphor, but 'twill serve. Surrey, with J. Shuter, K. J. Key, W. W. Read, Read (M.), and Abel, and later with Hayward and those great bowlers, Lohmann, Richardson, and Lockwood, were a most dangerous lot. Middlesex, with A. J. Webbe, A. E. Stoddart, C. I. Thornton, P. J. T. Henery, and the great left-hander, Ford, were a fine batting side, but they never seemed able to get their opponents out.

Somerset were a lot of good fellows, with two exquisite stylists in the Palairets and a raging lion in S. M. J. Woods. Sussex and Derbyshire were jokes. (Did not Hornby, in one of these early years, in each of the two matches against Derbyshire, make more runs off his own bat in one innings than the entire opposing eleven at two efforts ?) Let it be remembered that I am not giving a critical estimate of these counties. I am reproducing the views of a small boy who spent all his pocket-money at the County Ground. Remains Gloucestershire, of whom I never had any fear. Gloucester, in the days which were before Jessop, meant W. G. Grace, for whom Watson was always more than a match.

Never, in later life, have I known anything approaching the ecstasy, and sometimes the agony, of those days at Old Trafford. Cricket reporting was not then the elaborate and picturesque affair it has since become. Barlow was not invited to record in print what he thought and said when his captain ran him out. We did not read some such excuses of our brilliant amateurs as : " Unfortunately in attempting my famous hook-stroke to leg, and before I had scored, I fell over point, upsetting my wicket." No ; the papers gave the score with sober simplicity, and you had to go to the ground to see the game.

Pen cannot describe the feelings of a small boy as it neared noon on Whit-Monday, and the end of a two or three hours' wait on the sixpenny stand. Why must they waste so much of the morning? Here, at last, come the umpires! Will MacLaren lead his men into the field, or will he wait, bat in hand, for Ward to emerge from the professionals' gate and join him in that leisured walk to the wicket? If so, then it may be presumed that he will take first ball.

The boy holds his breath as Archie pats the first four balls back to the bowler. A single off the last and . . . the game is begun. It does not seem possible that our hero can survive the wiles of Hearne. Look out—*oh, look out!*

However, he does survive; though for the first half-hour the boy's heart is in his mouth. He cannot, contrariwise, understand how that dashing first pair for Kent can withstand Mold. They do, and it is Briggs who breaks up the partnership and sends Mason to the pavilion. Those were great days!

The finest individual piece of Lancashire batsmanship which I ever saw at Old Trafford was MacLaren's 47 against Somerset on a wet Saturday morning. The wicket was awful, and every ball was played with a majesty which almost hid the resourcefulness of this greatest of masters on a treacherous pitch. No blocking of half-volleys here, no respectful pushing of long hops to a bored mid-off. MacLaren played that day like a great master of chess, a Capablanca, a Steinitz, and a Morphy rolled into one.

The finest piece of bowling was the slow one to hit which Briggs tossed up to Ulyett, with Yorkshire wanting three runs to win and the two last men together. The mighty Yorkshireman lashed out, but Ward was waiting on the boundary. It is a matter of history that the crowd were round Albert patting him on the back whilst the ball was still in the air.

I have no doubt whatever that the great days will come again. The decadence is temporary, and is not confined to Lancashire. But is the spirit of the game quite what it was? I sat at Lord's recently during the Gentlemen and Players' match, watching the professionals spend the whole of the third day in simply keeping their wickets intact. It is true that they could not win, but that is no reason why they should not have played cricket and *gone for the bowling*.

Thirty years ago the batsman was the attacker; to-day he looks upon the bowler as master. "If you will allow me," each batsman at Lord's seemed to say, "I will take the liberty of not getting out this ball. But be assured I shall not presume to score off it!"

Now that 's not cricket. So at four o'clock I yawned myself home.

The following Sunday I watched two American teams play baseball. In future, when I have a shilling to lay out in sport it will not be at St. John's Wood but at Stamford Bridge. Could there be more hideous admission or sterner criticism ?

SOUTHEND

A FOOLISH person might say that I spent Bank Holiday by myself. As though anybody who has been jostled, shoved, squeezed, sat and trodden upon by half a million of his fellow-captives, free of London's yoke for a day, can have been alone! As well say that one of ten thousand cockles piled up on the fishmonger's slab is alone. Abandoned by my friends, and knowing nobody, I left Fenchurch Street for Southend, more properly London-by-the-Sea, that Riviera happily ignored of Mayfair, one of nineteen in a compartment, twenty-three if you count two babies on the rack, a concertina, and a mouth-organ. I had made provision of holiday literature—*The Pocket Newgate Calendar. A Series of Authentic Memoirs of Characters most famous in their day for having committed the Crimes of Murder, Housebreaking, Highway Robbery, Pocket-picking, Mutiny, Forgery, etc., etc.* But my arms were as closely pinioned as those of a scoundrel turned off at Tyburn. I noticed the usual score of locked and empty first-class carriages—a state of things to rouse the Bolshevik in the tamest breast. I would serve the directors as Jack Sheppard was served. They should "die with great difficulty," unpitied by the mob. And yet the railway companies wonder that a Whit Cunliffe should sing the alternative joys of "Ridin' dahn to Sahfend on a Sharrybank"!

"Do as Southend does," is the first preventive against loneliness. Take your fun with your kind, be rollicking members one of another, and the barriers of isolation will give way. The solitariness was hardly noticeable as they shouldered me down the road towards those rolling billows which Southend pier makes such desperate struggles to reach. For the first time in the year each renewed his marvelling at all that water which George Bass tells us was designed by a foreseeing Providence for boats to sit down upon. The old lady of the *camera oscura* puts the same idea in a line inscribed on the walls of her shanty:

> "Large ships on the crumpled green
> Sailing so grand."

Large ships there were and little, cockle-shells and tramps. An angler on the jetty's end plying his pathetic line borrowed my matches, and spoke casually of the beauty of the scene. But obviously his real interest lay in a monstrous candelabrum baited with joyless worms, in listening for the tinkle of a little bell which should indicate a bite, in hauling up the chandelier hung with nothing but seaweed, and so, as the musicians say, *da capo.* I watched him for an hour and noted that complete insuccess did not lessen his ecstasy. A fish, I was led to think, would have been a fly in the ointment of his perfect bliss.

" Do you ever catch anything ? " I asked.

" In fresh water, frequently," he replied.

We became sworn friends. He told me of his prowess among the salmon, and in return I lied about my golf.

But time pressed. A trip in a motor-launch, a queue-up for dinner, a football match, another queue for tea, brought more friends, and then the Kursaal, or Curse-All, as it is locally pronounced. Surely nothing but war can be more lavish of comradeship in common peril than those Alpine railways, far-flung aeroplanes, and desperate water-chutes. One clung and was clung to ; romance, at high altitudes, is very much in the air. During the torture known as " Whirlpools " I achieved something better than a new friendship, and that was a reconciliation. My companions in the tub of distress were a Vorticist painter, a free-rhyming poet, and a cacophonous composer whose work I have always loathed. They were sneaking a day's freedom from their highbrow chains. And in our common misery I forgave them their trespasses. You cannot remain enemies with a fellow whose solar plexus you have just successfully rammed with the back of your head, and all for threepence. And, besides, had I not discovered whence they draw their inspirations?

I am not one of those who, on a holiday, leave the serious business of life behind. That were to pass a night of dreamless sleep, whereas I like to wake and taste my bed. I found all my political animus revived, for example, at the sight of six frock-coated, life-size mannikins revolving on an axis. In at one door and out at another, as in Parliamentary lobbies. Each wore a battered silk hat and the air of grave incompetence which our caricaturists were wont to postulate for Mr. Bonar Law. Three shies for tuppence, and a prize to him who should lay a topper low. At the cost of half a crown I had won a butter-dish. But I had also evacuated spleen.

Even in the midst of new-found friendships and the healthy voiding of old animosities one wants intervals for reflection and self-communing. I found these in the distorting mirrors, suggesting that but for the grace of God humanity had been drawn like the creatures of H. M. Bateman, and in the spectacle of a penny-in-the-slot execution. I have seen Mr. Reginald Berkeley's *Eight O'clock*, but this moved me more. You inserted your penny, the lights went up, and the prison-door opened directly upon the place of execution. The murderer stood on the drop, clad from head to foot in khaki worsted, with a cap of the same material drawn over his head. Round his neck a lanyard of white thread. Four warders surrounded him, and in front stood a surpliced chaplain jerking his arms exhortatively in time with the chiming of a little clock which collected in the interior of the works its meagre strength and struck. The trap-doors opened, and simultaneously the wretch disappeared, the lights went out, and the performance was over. Eight times I caused the fellow to be hanged by the neck, and then, reluctantly, I adjudged him dead. Also I had no more pennies.

To banish melancholy I was photographed as an aviator, a cowboy, and a Red Indian, alone and in company ! I danced and roller-skated. Finally I had my fortune told. And let not my victory over loneliness be deemed entirely figurative. Picture your blameless essayist wedged romantically in a char-à-banc, a bag of shrimps in his bosom, a bottle of beer in his right hand, his left arm gallantly supporting one of Poplar's fair, on his head a hat not noticeably masculine. Hear him, at Barking, lament that he is Nobody's Darling, and at Plaistow desire, with forty others, to rejoin his Coal-black Mammy. Write him, in short, as one who loves a Bank Holiday spent with his fellow-men.

OSTEND

My friends are making a habit of blowing in and whisking me off to the uttermost ends of the earth. A week ago it was Southend, this week it was Ostend. A well-known statesman was the cause, an old school friend, who in the midst of pomp and circumstance still remembers the humble, and issues commands that you will disobey at your peril. The Great Man had fleets of taxis for ourselves and luggage, and armies of porters to dispose us comfortably in a reserved and spacious saloon ; high officials bowed, and altogether I basked in such weather as must have shone upon Le Roi Soleil. It was not until we arrived at Dover that I meekly demanded to know our destination.

" Ostend," was the reply, " for there only can one meditate upon the Ruhr."

Let me say here that all great men, even statesmen, are frauds, and that meditation in this instance proved to be the hollowest of pretences. I had provided myself with a large note-book and a specially sharpened pencil wherewith to jot down the improvisations of genius. But you cannot play Boswell if the other fellow will not be Johnson, and I regret to state that throughout forty-eight hours my friend uttered no word worthy of immortality.

"Dash it, we're down the nick again!" on backing a sixth consecutive loser and own sister to Tishy, is a remark which I myself might have used. "Same again, please, garçong," hardly seems to me worthy of record, whilst "Waiter, the bill!" is surely almost trivial. No, my Great Man proved himself on this occasion unworthy of a biographer, and my page remained virgin. Nor were his acts more significant than his utterances. They were chiefly aberrations of the intelligence, and I have to record that a genius, in whose hands the destinies of the country are not misplaced, lost in quick succession his hat, cigar-case, stick, one glove, and 12,000 francs at baccarat.

If the English are a nation of shop-keepers, it may equally be held that the continong is a conglomeration of restaurateurs, café owners, and hotel proprietors. And what hotels! The dining-room in the one at which the Great Man billeted me measured 140 yards—I know, for I paced it. The gaming saloon was 80 yards long. My bedroom was the size of a putting-green on a championship course, whilst the hotel "approach" was the length of a full drive. From the balcony outside my window I could survey all Ostend. To the left the sea, which, I firmly believe, remains faithfully English, whatever shore it may lap. To the right the race-course, where, within the reach of a mashie-shot, funny little jockeys mounted upon animals equally comical were competing for an absurdly lavish number of francs. In front and below, twelve plots of grass, each big enough for a lawn-tennis court, and unoccupied! These had neither flowers nor players, and contained just emptiness and a sense of desolate splendour. And that 's the key to Ostend. Splendour and a sense of desolation.

Or is it that I am too English? It is nothing to me to watch a dozen potty little horses competing for the Prix du Casino; and the smart toilettes of the society leaders do not interest me. After each race we drank champagne in a system of tunnels like the Underground Railway. Enormous Flemish ladies sat at little tables on what you would have thought were impossibly inadequate chairs.

" Like a picture by Rubens," said the Great Man, vouchsafing the single intelligent remark which I was to hear till we got home again. But as I don't enthuse over Rubens, the scene left me cold. After the racing we dined at our hotel in sombre state. We drank more champagne—Paul de Kock 1914. The evening was spent in the 80-yard-long gaming saloon, carpeted with marvels specially woven in Persia and brought by camels across the burning desert. The floor was littered with croupiers and bowing, fawning, silk-hosed, gold-laced flunkeys. Delicate little ladies hid their yawns behind bejewelled fingers. My friend lost 6000 francs with dignity, whilst I gaped unashamedly and twiddled my thumbs. Baccarat is a game for fools who have not the wit for Nap. Next day we went again to the races, gazed at still fatter Flemish ladies, drank champagne again, and dined *en ville* at an even more swagger, because smaller and more "select," hotel. Here they put us at a table in the window, so that the common people, taking the air of the sea-front after the day's work, could gaze at us and envy our wealth. I felt horribly ashamed. . . .

After dinner we went to the Casino, and my friend lost another 6000 francs. I spent the evening yawning, unutterably, horribly bored. Boredom producing hunger, on my return to our caravanserai I demanded a bite of cheese and a bitter. Impossible! Did Monsieur desire the grilled leg of a chicken and a bottle of Veuve Cheerio 1911? Monsieur did not. Monsieur was sick of champagne, and Monsieur was going to bed.

I saw my friend's bill. The price of a bedroom for a night would keep a working man and his family in this country for a fortnight and a trifle over. The tips. . . . But no! Whereas my bill at Southend was 6s. 6d. a day, board and lodging all told. Ostend is for those whose bliss is centred in diamonds and boiled shirts. But for me Ostend is nothing; it contains neither winkle nor mussel, roundabout nor swing. There is no fun-fair, there are no chars-à-bancs, and not once did I see Léon returning home with his arm round Berthe's waist and a hat obviously not his own.

I am sick of champagne. Next week-end I am off to Margate with a bloke who has never written a line or framed a bill. We shall dine like Englishmen off steak, chips, and a Guinness—perhaps two.

England, with all thy virtues, I love thee still!

Qualifications for membership of the N.I.B. Club were first, that one should be Not in Business, and second, that one should be concerned, how vaguely soever, with the advancement of letters. Members met once a month to consume a seven-and-sixpenny dinner on a stuffy fourth-floor in Soho. Three oysters inducted, or your plate was piled pell-mell with indistinguishable *hors-d'œuvre.* Burgundy, some four years old, was the invariable drink. To right and left of Cyprian, who had excitedly dipped into his slender capital for a new dress-suit, gobbled and lapped the minor celebrities of the literary world.

What a crowd they were! Writers of *feuilletons* and best-sellers; war correspondents languishing in that desert which to them peace is; dramatic critics wholly dependent upon gastronomy for their metaphors, and unable to get away from "the fare provided at this theatre"; paragraphists, fashion-recorders, sub-editors, publishers' touts. There was a sprinkling of real celebrities.

The woman with whom Cyprian was sent in was the bold, black beauty of whom all literary England and unliterary, belectured America know.

" I like you because of your writings," he declared, disdaining the shallow beach of flattery, and taking the honest plunge. He really did like Rachel South.

" Define me, then ! " she challenged.

" Trafalgar Square's fifth lion."

Rachel shook a black mane at him.

" Who 's the man at the centre table who looks as if his dinner had a bad smell ? "

" That 's Amulet Condor, the most difficult editor in London. I once asked for an interview, but couldn't get past the office-boy. I made a fuss. ' It 's no use,' the lad said. ' Cut yer froat, miss, and it 'll get yer inter the presence o' God Almighty, but yer gotter do more 'n that afore yer can reach *ahr* Editer ! ' You can no more deflate Amulet's vanity by telling him of it than you can burst a balloon with a cricket-ball."

" Who 's he talking to ? "

" Begonia Gumm, my hated rival. Looks like a Rubens touched up by Titian. She 's a really beautiful woman who poses for the intellectual altogether and sits on the floor at tea-parties. It 's a beautiful body, but she mistakes it for a brain."

" You 're cruel."

" Nonsense ; she 's my dearest friend. Still, I 'll admit that Biggy can be a bit silly. She *will* overpower people. I remember a dinner party at Old Treacle's—— "

" Who 's Old Treacle ? "

" Really, my dear boy, you don't know much about literary London. Old Treacle is the owner of *The Country Parson.* It brings him in fifteen thousand a year. Well, at Old Treacle's party last week Biggy went swimming, hippopotamus-wise, up to Edward Blodge and asked him if he didn't think *Lady into Fox* the best novel he 'd ever read. ' Do tell me, Blodgy darling,' she said—he 's well over ninety, so Biggy likes to think she can flirt with him—' do tell me that you think it the best novel ever ever ? ' Blodge looked at her over his spectacles and said gloomily, ' It 's the best novel about a lady being turned into a fox that I 've read this year.' "

Round about them rose a buzz of small talk concerning large circulations, forthcoming books, the meanness of publishers. These writers seemed a little lot, with a répertoire as limited as a cuckoo. Sales and Reviews were apparently their alternative notes. It is as well to avoid the society of artists unless one has a heart prepared for any disillusion. It is a scarifying thing to realize that your poet of enchantment is a fat little man who wears a dinner-jacket with a velvet collar and a whitish, made-up tie; that your acutest commentator upon human frailty should be a desiccated spinster, thin in the flank, addicted to prune-coloured sarcenet and garnets clapping warily upon empty salt-cellars.

"Are these our great writers?" asked Cyprian.

"They think so," replied Rachel. "But it isn't fair to judge us women by our frocks. Clothes are given us to keep up appearances and to help us live them down."

"Who 's the man with the big head and the high-pitched voice?"

"That 's Pool," said Rachel South. "R. G. 's the biggest man since Shakespeare. I 'll introduce you after dinner."

"I 'd rather keep my illusions."

"He 's a dear. He 'd like to meet you, and Hermione 's boring him."

"Who 's Hermione?"

"His wife, silly!"

But Cyprian refused. He had drunk too deep of R. G.'s intoxicating waters to risk what might be the sobering fount.

He now demanded information concerning the people at their table.

"The little Jew is Max Rosencrantz. He 's very clever, and has a wonderful flow of words. There isn't a peak in Darien which could silence him. Next to him is Jimmy Home. His emotion 's a positive flux. He 's almost blind."

"Isn't he always reporting murder-trials in South Wales ?"

"That 's where he wept his eyes away."

"Then we 've got Geoffrey Westmoreland. He 's celebrity's broadcaster, with a style like a surprise omelette left over from dinner, the chocolate gone cold and the ice melted. The others are Mr. Babble from the *Evening Back Chat* and Hugh Flatterby. Hugh 's the one who looks like a snow-man made out of suet. He 's Lord Wattlebird's factotum."

"And the women ?"

"The broody hen fussing at the top of the table is Mrs. Davidson Peary. She writes epics after Tennyson. 'Natheless and Yclept,' you know. I remember one which began, 'Eftsoons he prick'd athwart the murm'ring glade.' She deranges her periods splendidly."

"Who 's that next but one to her ?"

"Lowing at the skies, and all her silken flanks with garlands dressed ? That 's the little model who spends her life running after Perugino Brown, the painter, and catching him up."

"And the woman in red velvet ?"

"'Mirandolina.' Wrote *The Welkin's Top*, you know. Thought the Welkin was a mountain in

South Wales. She 's trying to talk Freud to Myrtle Hollinshed, but Myrtle won't let her. Myrtle 's really clever. Catty, distinctly catty, but clever."

" And on my other side ? " he whispered.

" Thorn St. Clair."

At this moment a voice boomed at him, and he heard a pocket edition of Queen Victoria saying :

" Do you agree, young man, that the opposition of mind to matter presupposes their essential unity ? "

Cyprian had an inspiration.

" Provided," he said, " they have no bananas."

Dinner, apart from Rachel South, was dull, and the ensuing *mêlée* a scrimmage of stupidities.

When Cyprian got home that night he found bills from his tailor and hosier, both of whom insisted, with a minimum of literary flourish, upon their accounts being settled at once. He regretted having drawn upon his too slender capital for that new dress-suit.

AT A REHEARSAL

"LET me not see," wrote that enthusiastic playgoer, William Hazlitt, "a Columbine practising a pirouette in sober sadness, nor overlook the fellow who holds the candle for the moon." Instinctively one shuns that desert of disillusion known as the green-room. To witness a play from the wings, to see "Mr. Grimaldi's face drop from mirth to sudden melancholy as he passes the side-scene" is bad enough; to watch a rehearsal from the twilit, shrouded stalls is the very nadir of melancholy. To hear Desdemona cry out her piteous "Am I that name, Iago?" followed by a querulous "Really, Mr. Smith, I must beg that you will not catch me quite so clumsily! I throw myself—so! You must hold me—so! Once again, please. 'Am I that name, Iago?'"—to see this "business" gone through a dozen times, till Mr. Smith's arms ache and Miss Brown is satisfied with her "effect," this, I affirm, is to knock the bottom out of tragedy.

Every sensible playgoer tries to be like a child at a pantomime, who believes that Prince Charming spends all his waking hours, off the stage as well as on, in tights and jewelled garters, ruffled shirts and three-cornered hats. Really, the child does not visualize the Prince in her private capacity ; and to connect Her Radiance with a bottle of stout were a more fantastic thing than to confound the moon with green cheese. Hazlitt was like a child. He refused to believe that Cato painted or Caesar combed. He refused to peep and pry into the private workings of the stage "like a magpie looking into a marrow-bone." I think I must be a better playgoer than Hazlitt, and feel confident that I am possessed of a higher illusion than any child.

I do not for one moment believe that Mr. Smith and Miss Brown are Antony and Cleopatra. I have read in the morning paper that Mr. Smith's golfing handicap is plus one, and that in yesterday's tournament, "Stage *v.* Press," he beat the well-known paragraphist, Mr. Sydney Blurt, by three up and one to play. I have also gleaned that Miss Brown drives a six-cylinder Macgillicuddy Reeks, is devoted to poodles, and quite fond of her husband and children. But do I remember these things when in that palace at Alexandria Cleopatra challenges Antony to declare the measure of his love, and the brave fellow spouts his nonsense about new heaven and new earth ? Yes, I remember these things quite perfectly, and believe that the measure of a playgoer's capacity for playgoing is his power to put these things by.

It was this courage of disillusion which persuaded me to accept an invitation to witness a morning rehearsal at the Alhambra Theatre. I knew beforehand all that I should see and hear—the bare waste of stage; the scene-shifters busying themselves with that "drawing-room set" which, together with a derelict sofa and two castaway chairs, rickety, plush-covered, and altogether abominable, shall represent Lady Golightly's boudoir; the men in the flies hauling up from the floor odds and ends of coral islands, glades of Fontainebleau, and that inhuman, tenantless view of Hyde Park corner. I knew beforehand how steadfastly the conductor would preserve his soul with all those indecipherable band-parts raining down upon him.

"Do you want a crescendo here?"

"No! I want it louder!"

And the conductor smiles, and orders the trombone to empty his lungs into that passage marked "*ff*" or "double forte." The comedian has scribbled "eighty" in the margin!

I was prepared for a stage as confused and disorderly as a battlefield, for a little dancer outlining her steps and looking very much like a bird before it has learned to fly, for a ventriloquist rehearsing the song which not he, but his dummy, will presently sing. What I was not prepared for was the grave, untheatrical figure to whom I was now presented.

"You two ought to know each other," said the manager. And it was signified to me that I was in the presence of Mr. Talbot O'Farrell. But where were the check trousers and the blue, double-breasted pea-jacket, the grey topper, the single eyeglass, the white gloves, the stick?

Suddenly it dawned upon me that I had always cherished a purely childish view of this artist, that as I saw him accoutred upon the stage, so also I had imagined he must be in real life. A jovial O'Farrell, a Talbot sentimental—that was to be looked for. But a figure resembling that of an ambassador, a presence like that of a statesman taking the waters at Homburg—this disconcerted me considerably. After a time I recovered my presence of mind, and we talked learnedly of many things—golf and Japan, sailing ships and sealing-wax, cabbages and kings. I confessed to a nasty habit of writing about plays and actors.

"Have a cigar?" said the genial one, promptly.

"Bribery?" I asked.

"No, sir! Corruption!"

And the real man, the comedian, came to birth in a merry twinkle.

Less than two hours later I sat in the fourth row of stalls, as excited and pleased and happy as though I had never been at a music-hall performance before. The little lady had given her successful impersonations of bird and butterfly, the comedian had worked off his gags at the expense of the big bass-fiddle, the ventriloquist's dummy had sobbed to break our hearts. The curtains parted to disclose a grand piano, a modest young gentleman played the opening bars of "When the sun goes down," and to the plaintive melody there walked on a pair of check trousers, a blue reefer jacket, a grey topper. It was Mr. O'Farrell all complete. And I forgot about our solemn talk and listened again to that voice which goes so very near to unbinding the sweet influences of Pleiades and loosing the bands of Orion. This, and not my friend of two hours earlier, was the real person. And, the better to applaud him, I threw away the stump of an excellent cigar.

ON LOOKING INTO *LITTLE ARTHUR*

It was the extraordinary success of *Oliver Cromwell* at His Majesty's Theatre which prompted me to look again into my first history-book—*Little Arthur's History of England.*

There are certain things which, whilst memory holds, I know that I shall never forget. They are the eleven inseparable prefixes to German verbs, the dates of the first four "proper" English kings—one doesn't really count those Saxon fellows—and, for some curious reason, the unique export of Greece. Often I wake up in the middle of the night repeating "Be—emp—er——, ent—ver—zer, etc.," or "William I, 1066; William II, 1087," and so on; or I cry out aloud: "The principal export of this country is currants."

Three names there are in English history which I shall never forget, and they are not to be found in any list of our Great Men. Yet they stand out more clearly in my mind than Simon de Montfort, Wat Tyler, or Perkin Warbeck. They are the names of Dr. Juxon, Mr. Herbert, and Colonel Hacker. The first was Bishop of London, the second a valet, the third a soldier of sorts. This is an odd trick of the mind which needs no Freud to elucidate. The explanation is simply that two of these were impressed upon my childish brain as the names of the most faithful friends of the unhappiest monarch in history. To their lasting shame neither Wills, that late lamented dramatist, nor the present distinguished Mr. Drinkwater have made mention in their dramas of these two noble people. It was Lady Callcott who, in *Little Arthur*, immortalized them.

I could have repeated with perfect accuracy any time during the past thirty-five years this, to me, most purple passage in all literature :

> " The next morning, very early, the king called Mr. Herbert to help him to dress, and said it was like a second marriage-day, and he wished to be well dressed, for before night he hoped to be in Heaven. While he was dressing he said : ' Death is not terrible to me ! I bless God that I am prepared.' Good Bishop Juxon then came and prayed with Charles, till Colonel Hacker, who had the care of the king, came to call them. Then the king walked to Whitehall, and as he went one soldier prayed, ' God bless him.' And so he passed to the banqueting house, in front of which a scaffold was built. King Charles was brought out upon it, and after speaking a short time to his friends and to good Bishop Juxon, he knelt down and laid his head upon the block, and a man in a mask cut off his head with one stroke."

As a child I was as much a sentimentalist as the grown-up Mr. Chesterton. I naturally preferred cricket or even trap-and-ball to history lessons, yet confess that on wet days I often read certain parts of *Little Arthur* for my own amusement. They were chiefly the accounts of the Spanish Armada, Gunpowder Plot, and this most romantic and dastardly execution. There was a spot of iron-mould on the page, and in some childish way I got it into my head that this was a drop of the royal martyr's blood, spilled by that deft and single blow. I have never been able to see how any well-brought-up child could be other than a Royalist.

Listen to our authoress on the Protector :

> "This Cromwell was a Puritan, or Roundhead. He was brave and very sagacious, and very strictly religious according to his own notions, though some men thought him a hypocrite ; at all events he was always thinking how he could make himself the greatest man in England."

And I am not at all sure that even Mr. Drinkwater's imaginary portrait gives me any very different notion.

I remain as much a Royalist as I was at the age of ten. The best picture of Charles is not Van Dyck's, but *Arthur*'s little wood-cut which shows him in the act of handing to the good Bishop his Order of the George set with diamonds, prior to laying his head on the block. I looked into the book yesterday for the first time since childhood, and was surprised to find how greatly in this picture Charles has come to resemble Sir Thomas Beecham.

I spent the whole day in reading this really wonderful little book. England is described as "joined to another country called Scotland, and the two together are called Great Britain." What have little Welsh boys to say to this slight? Of Ireland I read:

> "It was never conquered by the Romans; and the people were as ignorant as the Britons before the Romans came, with just the same sort of houses and clothes. They might have been in the same state for many years if a very good man, whom the Irish called Saint Patrick, had not gone from Britain to Ireland and taught the people to be Christians; and he and some of his companions also taught them to read; *and the Irish people began to be a little more like those in other parts of the world*."

There is an admirable sanity about our historian, and her insistence upon the peculiar magnanimity of the English in victory links the days of St. Athelstane with those of the Boer War. There is one passage concerning the nobility which I would have written in letters of gold over the cot of every little budding Bolshevik. It runs:

> "Now when a man has been made a noble, and his name is remembered because he is good, or manly, or clever, or brave, or wise, his sons will say to themselves, 'Our dear father has been made a noble because he was good or

brave; we must be good or brave or useful, too, that people may see that he taught us well, and that we know how to love and honour him by following his good example.' . . . The nobles of England are useful to the country. As they are rich enough to live without working for themselves and their families, they have time to be always ready when the king wants advice; or when there is a Parliament to make laws; or when the king wishes to send messages to other kings. And as their forefathers were made noble because of their goodness, wisdom, or bravery, they have in general followed their example, and they have always, next after the king, been the people we have loved best, and who have done us the most good."

And then follows a passage which makes me wonder whether the dear lady had not her tongue at times ever so little, delicately and deliciously, in her cheek.

"When you are older you will understand this better, and you will find out many more reasons to be glad that we have noblemen in our own dear country."

Two chapters have been added since I was a boy—I must think by the hand of Mr. Lytton Strachey.

"King Edward's reign, though short, was a time of many changes. One of the most remarkable movements was the demand of women for votes. Now, I should like you to understand that a great many wise people were in favour of this, but, unhappily, the more violent agitators amongst the women, by breaking windows and setting fire to houses, so put the people against it that any chance it ever had of being passed was extinguished."

Little Arthur is a delightful book. Peruse it again, dear reader. Perhaps, like me, you will find many things that you have forgotten. Perhaps, again like me, you will wonder how Queen Elfrida's servant, shown in the picture as standing at the off shoulder of an earlier King Edward's horse and facing that thirsty monarch, contrived as the king was drinking to stab him in the back. The text stipulates this, however, and if you see a thing in *Little Arthur*, it is so.

OF PARROTS

Yesterday I had a windfall. How or why doesn't matter, but it fell into my hand as unexpectedly as that manna from heaven, in which I have never quite believed, whereas I must believe in that postal order for thirty shillings—so long, at least, as the credit of the British Empire holds.

Now thirty shillings is a miserable sum ; too much for one at Ritz, Carlton, or Savoy, and not enough for two. It will not keep a working man and family for any conscionable period, nor will it go far towards repairing the façade of St. George's Hospital.

I stood at my window and turned the postal order over and over. There are so many things which I have wanted for so long : a new pipe, half a dozen spring shirts, an old coursing print marked at two guineas, but which I might get for thirty bob if I planked down my order with a flourish. I have known many a horse-deal clinched, not by the flashing of a cheque, apt for dishonouring, but by the crinkle of new notes. And then I realized that there was something which I wanted more than any other thing.

For suddenly I espied coming down the street a cart drawn by an almost improbable horse led by a quite improbable man. On the cart were cages, and the cages were those of parrots. Bell-shaped, with a golden knob at the top, a golden ring for the bird's delight, and silver wires for his security. (Parrots don't want their liberty, really. What would they do with it?) And at once I knew that of all things in this world I most desired a parrot.

I threw up my window.

"How much?" I cried.

"Two quid and upwards, guv'nor," the would-be vendor shouted. "All genuine cocks! Guaranteed talkers!! Any langwidge, including Chinese and American!!!"

Well, it did not seem quite hopeless, so I descended to the street, and stood in wonder before some dozen cages containing specimens of the authentic chatterer, the sage macaw, and the flippant, licentious parrakeet. It was one of these last that I coveted, a little green fellow with a red beak and a purple ring round his neck. We chaffered him down to thirty-five shillings.

I made pretence of turning away. "When are you coming round again?" I asked, over my shoulder.

"In a year's time, guv'nor."

Now it is manifestly impossible for anybody whose heart is really set on a parrot to wait a whole year. I flung an ultimatum: "A guinea and a half!" Ten minutes later, at one twelve six, he was mine!

And now my troubles began. At once I despatched my landlady's little boy to scour the neighbourhood for all available literature on the Conurus carolinensis (*Ency. Brit.*—always useful in an emergency!). He returned with an out-of-date number of *The Aviary*. (I reflect that they may not have discovered anything revolutionary about parrots in the last fortnight.) The first article, "Practical Hints on Mule Breeding," seems hardly helpful, nor am I entranced by "The Crow as Pet." Who that can afford a parrakeet would put up with a beastly crow? The page devoted to "Readers' Problems" intrigues me greatly. "Amazon Parrot Sneezing."—Obviously Parrot septicaemia, says the editor, to be treated by spraying the bird's nostrils with a tepid dilute solution of glyco-thymoline. But my bird hasn't got any nostrils that I can discover! Perhaps it doesn't come from the Amazon. "Parrot with Suspected Cramp." "Parrot with Sore Eye." "Earache in Cockatoo." But my beauty hasn't got any ears! How the devil . . . ? If only birds had sensible complaints like windgalls or spavins, quittor or seedy-toe, I should know how to deal with them. "Feeding Troubles" is another entry. Well, if my bird can't manage on a bit of lamb chop and mashed potato—which is what I had for lunch—it will have to shift for itself.

I begin to realize that there may be something in Barry Pain's animadversions on the parrot. I remember with misgiving his entries in Robinson Crusoe's Profit and Loss account after the wreck. On the Debit side, "I have lost half my fortune." On the Credit the significant: "But I have lost the whole of my parrot."

I put down *The Aviary* on discovery of a melancholy paragraph having to do with post-mortems. Fortunately the hawker has guaranteed my bird to last for a hundred years.

For three hours yesterday I sat beside the cage listening with greater expectancy than I use at any first night at the theatre. Perhaps this is a hen and, in birds, it is the cock only who chatters. Horrid thought—suppose parrakeets don't talk? Upon this vital subject my Encyclopædia preserves a strange silence. Perhaps I have been done? I do not think so. Parrot-vendors, as a class, are above suspicion. I will wait.

There may be those who deem a passion for a parrot unbecoming a serious-minded man and responsible journalist. Not so. Ernest Renan, "un homme sérieux," if ever there was one, indulged his old age with some such toys without meeting too crushing rebuke. Hear M. Barrès :

> " Un temps viendra où l'on aimera encore ses défauts de vieillesse, où l'on saura comme lui se distraire avec les turquoises et les perroquets d'Ophir, avec les bijoux des femmes de Salomon ; mais aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas son heure : il était un sage qui faisait un peu de fantaisie, et maintenant les plus fous désirent d'être graves."

Yet since Frenchmen are always flighty I will dive for moral reinforcement into sterner records. It may be that grave Matthew Arnold or priggish Emerson cherished, in secret, a pet like mine.

THE BACKS AT MAIDA VALE

A great deal of unnecessary fuss seems to me to be made of the "backs" at Cambridge, although I do not deny that behind the colleges there may be pleasant sauntering. I was a little tired on the occasion when these famous glimpses were vouchsafed to me; the day had been hot and I had pedalled some eighty miles on an old-fashioned push-bicycle. Let me then concede the Cambridge beauty, but let me also proclaim that there is, in Maida Vale, a set of "backs" which I would not exchange for those others.

As I shave in the morning my gaze often wanders past the little mirror which depends, by a happy contrivance, from the latch in the centre of the window. I behold twelve back-doors, twelve rectangular back-gardens, twelve trees, and some hundred and twenty windows. The gardens belong to "our" row; the dwellers in that other and meaner street have no gardens. Perhaps they have no children to play in them. As pleasaunces these severely shaped plots are of little worth. Most of them have never been cultivated, the others are cultivated no longer. Even the weeds have not the strength to choke one or two sickly plants which, curiously enough, choose November for their wan flowering.

Once a week there is a pale rapture of cotton and of linen, but these domestic banners and pennants hang out but for a day. A decayed arbour, a broken-down summer-house—these are the melancholy variants to the heaps of decaying rubbish. It might be hazarded that the trees are poplars. From their ascetic heads branches still shoot; but the trees, as trees, have given up earthly hope. Yet even they, one supposes, look in their tree-minds for another and a better world, where there shall be a survival of tree-personality, and where all the gardens shall be front gardens and the back gardens shall be no more. A dull subject, you say? But wait.

Every morning when it is fine I behold a group of four; two little girls whom I judge to be aged eleven and nine, and their little brother, aged seven. The fourth personage is a wooden horse, to which is attached a wagonette made out of a large orange-box with a smaller one super-imposed for box-seat.

Your stickler might object that the proportions are not well observed; indeed, the horse and half a dozen more of his size could be comfortably contained within the vehicle. But just as, on the stage, five well-placed and cohesive bricks will represent the frowning walls of Harfleur, and two spilled upon the floor the breach that gallant Harry made—so for this happy band of sisters and brother a clumsy contraption of orange-boxes and a horse which long ago cast its rockers make up the perfect equipage. The boy, first carefully gathering the reins, mounts the box, as is his right ; the girls are bidden inside. A great blow on the steed's flanks with a bit of broken bamboo and they 're off !

With clever horsemanship our driver takes the corners, slackens to a walk up-hill, and gathers his horse on the steep descents. The clatter of the hoofs, which is done by drumming with the heels against the sides of the orange-box, is carefully regulated. The party baits, I take it, at the Star and Garter. Or it may be that it is at some country inn that the party pulls up. The driver calls, but as none hears him and no ostler sallies forth, he bids the younger of the sisters go to the horse's head. Throwing the reins over its dappled back, our whip gravely descends. After an interval, thirst appeased and legs stretched, he remounts the box.

One day the little sister, attracted by the extraordinary discovery of a flower, leaves the animal untended, and at once there is a hullabaloo to rejoice the horseman's heart.

" Silly ! " shouts the tyrant, as he boxes the culprit's ears, "don't you know the 'orse might 'ave got awy ?"

Floods ensue.

Repenting of his brutality, and bidding his little sister dry her eyes, our hero consents that she shall mount the box and "drive." But he keeps one hand on the reins in case of need.

What habit of unconscious memory is there here ? Is the little fellow descended from a line of Jehus ? Does his father work at the neighbouring mews ? I know one thing only—that though in years to come there be another war and the child grow up to profiteer thereby, no Rolls-Royce and no Daimler will outdo those orange-boxes and that wooden horse. His little figure of joy it is which makes me prefer "our" backs above those of Cambridge.

A MATTER OF TASTE

You would call me, I suppose, an intensive rather than an extensive reader of newspapers. I devour about half of all of them. That is to say, I eschew all political stuff, all divorce cases, all turf news. Per contra, as they say in counting-houses, I swallow greedily every scrap about boxing, the theatre, old pictures and new books. And especially do I dote on the personal, or agony column, opening as many new windows upon life as it contains paragraphs. Imagine my joy at discovering in the *Observer* for March 11, 1923, the following:

> WILL THE GENTLEMAN enjoying Mustard with Mutton at the Savoy Saturday night communicate with EPICURUS?

For years I have been surreptitiously enjoying mustard with mutton in palatial hotels, chop-houses, and even that which I call my home. (Comf. bd.-res.; cen.; young soc.; dancing, orch.; 'phone, gdns., lib. tab.; terms mod.) And all the time scandalizing the young society around me. Once, even, I overheard a youthful and exquisite something in the City say to the little typist who dines opposite him, "My dear Miss Miniver, no gentleman moving . . . takes mustard with . . ." He dropped his voice here, but I guessed the rest and, taking another dab, defiantly burnt my tongue.

There was no denying the fact that the paragraph began: "Will the gentleman . . ." It had caught my eye in the Tube something after midnight. I had been spending the day in the country the other side of Waterloo, and the train was full. At Piccadilly, waiting on the platform, was one of those little knots of workmen armed with hammers, forceps, Davy lamps, the paraphernalia of the breakdown gang. But inasmuch as I see these fellows regularly, and as tunnels cannot always be falling in, I imagine their work to be putting that timely stitch into the fabric of the Underground which is to save nine later on. However, that is unimportant.

What is important is that all of them carried little baskets, except one fellow whose provision for the night's refreshment was wrapped up in a gorgeous scarlet handkerchief. Now just as a brass band made the little girl ever so much happier than she really was—the best of all definitions of ecstasy—so there are certain colours, but principally scarlet, which provoke me to delirium, to the point of agreeing with the fellow who said that there are no miseries in the world which yellow plush cannot compensate.

The youth, whom I judged to be about nineteen, wore dungaree trousers of brilliant hue, an old Army tunic, and round his neck a kerchief of the same brilliant red. He had tumbling black hair, gypsy's eyes, and the Spanish complexion which you see so often in the East End. His nose had been broken, with the result that it attained almost to Greek perfection ; a "fag" dangled between two lines of colour repeating the note of the handkerchief, and his teeth were brilliant as those of a chimney-sweep. The tattooist had ornamented the backs of his hands, his wrists, and all round the forearm, as richly as the most refined taste could demand. A painter would not have needed to idealize this subject ; even in art the truth is sometimes good enough. First of his band, he darted in and took the only vacant seat, which happened to be opposite me.

"Nah, then, navvies," he cried to his friends, "yer 'll 'ave to stand. And thet 's too good for most on yer !"

They cuffed him, out of pure friendliness.

For some time I could not make up my mind where I had seen the lad before. And then I remembered ; I beheld, in a flash, a slewed-round square of canvas and posts and one of two boxers desperately hurt and obviously beaten. He was holding on long, long after the point when, as the poet says,

". . . there is nothing in you, Except the will which says to you 'Hold on!'" He fumbled for a match, and as I leaned across and gave him my box I asked, "Haven't I seen you fight somewhere?"

He grinned.

"Very likely you 'ave, guv'nor. Billy Iggs, of Marrybun, 'e give me dis just afore Christmas." He tapped his nose. I told him I remembered the great fight he had put up.

"'Ad 'im licked," he said, "but the ref. 'e stopped it."

The spirit of Nelson, then, is not dead!

"Can't get my nose to bleed, nah," he went on, "and this 'ere job 's agin me. You 'd fink, if we was to 'ave a fight, as 'ow swinging a fourteen-pound 'ammer 'd be in my favour, nah wouldn't yer, guv'nor?"

I thought that it might be in his favour.

"Well, it wouldn't be. It makes yer muscle-bound."

"Breakfast?" I asked, as he gave a twist to the knot on the scarlet handkerchief.

"Lunch, guv'nor," he replied. "Five courses, h'and cawfee! It 's cold mutton reely, if yer want ter know."

"Excellent," I said. "Especially with plenty of mustard."

"Muvver sees to that orlright," he answered. "Good-night, boss; this 'ere 's our station. Come on, navvies, you wot likes work!"

He darted out. His friends, tumbling after, cuffed him once again, out of pure good-fellowship.

I hope the foregoing may catch the eye of Epicurus, and help him to realize that at least two other gentlemen share the not so extraordinary taste of the bloke at the Savoy.

CONCERNING SWANK

One day last week I dropped a card through Hubert's letter-box, recommending him to see a new play which I had thought particularly well acted. Now Hubert is a nice lad, only a shade punctilious. His soul revolts before such enormities as spats with turned-up trousers, or a pink tie and a green shirt. Hubert wrote to me two days later, thanked me for my recommendation, and drew up a careful balance-sheet of the play's merits and demerits. He thought the heroine's morning wrapper a shade too elaborate for a really "nice" woman or really "select" part of London, and asked if I had noticed that the hero wore a white waistcoat with dinner-jacket and black tie. "But all that is of minor importance," he went on. "That which touches me more nearly is the discovery that your visiting cards are all wrong! My dear fellow, they are dreadful! You must burn them at once!! They are printed!!! I should have thought you would have known that a gentleman's cards

MUST BE ENGRAVED.

See to it at once. Your whole future may be imperilled."

As to the fact that my cards are printed Hubert is correct. I sent an order to my stationer, to be delivered in half an hour, so what else could I expect? And for the life of me I cannot see that, logically, anything is wrong with the beastly things. They are legible; the name is plain for all the world to read; the address is where it ought to be—in the bottom left-hand corner. But Hubert is not satisfied. *The cards are not engraved.*

But then Hubert comes of very old stock, the de la Mouche's (pronounced "Douche"). Hubert cannot go to a dance without inflicting upon his hostess, the following Thursday week, an unwanted call of fifteen minutes' duration exactly. He would abjure his religion sooner than send a Christmas card with the flap of the envelope tucked in. A pipe in the street, and a cigar in a drawing-room, though urged upon him by a hostess who herself smokes, are alike unthinkable. He would, in a game of lawn tennis with Mlle. Lenglen, moderate his serve out of pure gallantry, chivalrously concede Miss Leitch a ten-yard putt. He has one shape of topper for Ascot and another for the Horse Show; a third, more reverential in brim, for Church Parade. He reads the *Morning Post*. He dresses every night for dinner, even when he takes his chop alone in his discreet apartment in Half-Moon Street. He would dress in an Alaskan shack! In short, Hubert is that demoded and useless thing—the perfect gentleman.

We met soon afterwards in the street. Our differing social spheres might have been gauged by an observer who noted that whereas I carried a bass containing half a dozen ditto and my week-end supply of solids, Hubert's arms were full of scentless ultramarine pinks. They were to make his peace with Lady Tit Willow for his abominable redouble of Five Hearts against Admiral Jibboom (pronounced "Joom") and Lady Lingery at the Hon. Mrs. de l'Aperture's (pronounced "Hole") on the previous evening.

"About those cards of yours, old man," he began. "You can't use them. They are the sort of thing Pooter or Eliza's Husband would have perpetrated."

In a moment of weakness I promised to accept his offer of some of the correcter sort.

On the following Sunday evening Hubert rang me up. Would I make up a Bridge-table at Lady Polwottle's (pronounced "Pottle"), who was short of a man? Reluctantly I abandoned my idea of spending a knickered hour at the Clutch and Spanner, and, reaching for my cap, sallied forth. I found six tables in progress, with every one of the players in evening dress.

"Mouche ought to have told me to change my kit," I preluded lamely.

"But surely," said the obviously outraged Pottle, "on Sundays after seven o'clock everybody that one knows is in evening dress!"

"On the contrary, dear lady," I retorted, "on Sundays after seven o'clock everybody that I know is in a public-house."

And bowed myself out.

The next morning I found a neat little packet of beautifully engraved cards posted to me by Hubert's stationer. As I was admiring their chaste lettering my landlady came up to tell me of a poor wretch at the door who wanted a job. He had sent up his name, not on a card, engraved or otherwise, but scrawled in lead-pencil on a dirty bit of paper. I tore up each of my nice new pasteboards into four pieces, remade the aristocratic little parcel, and addressed it to Hubert, with a note on unemployment.

I have been able to give the man some copying. He has an ailing wife and four children, to keep whom he denies himself food, drink, clothes, tobacco, and all amusements. He is methodical, educated, of a literary turn; kind-hearted, and obliging.

But, by Hubert's definition, he is not a gentleman.

HEROIC ENCOUNTER

All my life I have been hobnobbing with famous people. They have not been aware of it, but I have, which is the important thing. When I was a golden-haired mite, my curls were patted by Sims Reeves. I remember that I was taking the air of the Blackpool promenade in a commodious perambulator, and that the famous singer wore white kid gloves with diamond rings outside.

It was on that same seashore a few years later that I withstood an over from W. G. Grace, and even sneaked him to leg for a couple. I have given directions in the street to Hackenschmidt, and lunched at the next table but one to Sir Henry Irving's stage-manager. Once even I sat in a farmhouse chair at Aber, North Wales, three-quarters of a mile from the Falls, the very day after Mr. Gladstone had occupied it.

But it is since I came to live in London that my heroic encounters have become more frequent, and more particularly since I took up my abode in Montmorency Square, Place, Gardens, Grove, Mansions, Residences, Buildings, Mews. *Que sais-je ?* I can never quite remember exactly where I live, and apparently the same difficulty obtains with my unexpected visitors, who mistake their friends' addresses and find, in place of a smiling host and hostess, a disgruntled journalist scratching his head for an article. I have entertained recently, for the space of half a minute, a film star and a Cabinet Minister ; and once a noble lord so far bemeaned himself as to share my supper of kippers and green Chartreuse. But that is another story. The immediate point is that yesterday, whilst I was cogitating what picture my screen should mirror, there came a knock at the door. " Come in ! " I shouted, and in walked Mr. Joseph Beckett.

Now I suppose that if this country were ever to be so misguided as to demand a republic there would be, after the Sovereign, six overwhelmingly popular candidates for Presidency. These I take to be the Prince of Wales, Jimmy Wilde, Hobbs, Donoghue, Joe Beckett, and Sir Harry Lauder. I have spoken to them all, chiefly, I confess, in the ejaculatory vein of " Hip, hip, hurrah ! " " Well hit, sir ! " and " Come on, Steve ! " And at least one of them has spoken to me. It was at the Holborn Stadium on the occasion of the Johnny Basham-Matt Wells fight. On my way to my seat, magnificently shirt-fronted and expensively cigar'd, I fell over a pair of legs. "Beg pardon, sir!" said their owner. "Bloomin' well think you do!" I replied, with the courage born of a good dinner. A general roar greeted this, and looking round I found that I had not been too polite to Mr. Joseph Beckett. I expressed contrition and we shook hands.

And yesterday the Great Man was in my rooms. It must suffice here if I say that I have always regarded boxing as the noblest of the arts, and "Joe" as our bravest fighter. There was all the pluck of Rorke's Drift in that furious battle with Moran.

Of course my telephone was at Joe's service. Whilst his number was being got I managed to stammer out an extraordinary number of things—how much I admired my visitor, how soon that new book would be out which is to contain a whole chapter devoted to his person, how ardently I desired leave to send him an advance copy.

This was graciously accorded.

And then I made a mistake.

"Where shall I address it?" I asked.

Joe's eyes opened to their widest.

"Southampton, of course!" he said.

I felt a fool.

But I think I was forgiven. Cocking his eye at my photos of Hackneys and my picture of Jimmy Wilde before he was famous, Joe asked me if I would accept in return for my book a signed portrait of himself.

Not only did I accept, but I am hurrying on the publisher.

And then, "How much do I owe you for the telephone?"

"Forty thousand pounds and half the gate!" trembled on my lips. But I had the sense to murmur something about sufficient honour.

I escorted my visitor to his car.

No! I did not ask impertinent questions about the forthcoming fight.[1] But I can assure my readers that, whatever the condition of the injured hand, the one which he offered me is in perfect order! I delayed Joe as long as I could so that the neighbours might have some idea of my importance as the friend of the mighty. But not a soul looked out of door. Whereas if it had been the tax-collector, or an infuriated landlord after the rent, or even the gentleman from the hire-purchase furniture store, every window would have had its head. Not a soul saw Joe depart except Biddles, who was performing her ablutions on the doorstep.

"Cat," I said, "that was the heavy-weight champion of Great Britain!"

But Biddles went on washing her ears.

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[1] With Georges Carpentier, a French boxer.

I am thinking of putting up a plate on the house front :

JOE BECKETT TELEPHONED FROM HERE !

And I shall leave room for another :

JAMES AGATE LIVED HERE 1923——

I think I shall add the word

PRECARIOUSLY.

ON BEING OVERHAULED

There are many kinds of bores, but possibly the most wearisome are those who discuss openly (*a*) their ill-health, and (*b*) their health. I propose to say something of both states of mind and body, trusting to the reader to lessen his boredom by putting himself in my place. For I possess the normal health of the normal reader. I am hungry five or six times a day. I am always thirsty. I am liveliest in the small hours, and hate getting up. In other words, I never ail anything that matters.

And then, on Saturday last, my knee cracked up, just as I was on the point of taking a holiday on the Scotch golf courses. I had found a new type of driver which puts the ball down the dead centre of the pretty two hundred and fifty yards from the tee. Automatically and every time. I picked up a club of this sort in a pro.'s shop at Great Yarmouth, tested it, and at once took a tourist ticket for Gleneagles. And then my knee jacked up, and I could only hobble to the doctor's.

Being a healthy individual, I have no regular medical attendant. Every seven years I get vaccinated, and that suffices in the way of doctors. So I looked round, and made careful choice among the plates which adorn almost every other door in my salubrious neighbourhood. I am particular about doctors. I won't have a man who is a total abstainer, a non-smoker, a vegetarian, or any other kind of crank. I won't have a man who diagnoses every case as appendicitis, and gets out his carving-knife before the maid has opened the door. It is hard to read a medical man from his plate, but I think it can be done. I took my knee to one whom I judged to be a decent body—Dr. Robinson Brown-Jones. Never did I make more woeful mistake.

First he drew a chart of my person, identification marks, scars, blemishes, teeth missing, tattooings, etc., etc. Then he launched upon a tremendous inquisition. How many of my forbears had died in asylums, prisons, workhouses? Did I like lean bacon or fat? How much did I smoke? Why? Then, suddenly, he rapped out:

"Are you alcoholic?"

"Haven't been drunk for years!" I replied indignantly.

"Didn't say you had. How much do you drink a day?"

Well, it's no use hiding the truth from one's doctor, so I totted it up. There was the glass of sherry before lunch, and the modest half of bitter during that meal, and I don't say "no" to a glass of port afterwards. Shall we suppose a cocktail or two before dinner, a pint of claret and a liqueur? A four-act play has, of necessity, three intervals, and one can't smoke an entirely dry pipe before turning in. It sounds beastly, doesn't it?—almost like a chapter in Rabelais. Still the truth 's the truth. I had not the nerve to reel off what is, I am persuaded, a very modest programme. Instead, I said weakly, "About six glasses of beer a day, doctor."

"Distinctly alcoholic!" he said, with a frown.

And then he took my blood-pressure, which should be, I am told, one's age plus 100. I was nine strokes above Bogey.

"Too old for your years!"

"Does that mean that I 've enjoyed life?"

"It does."

"Well, then, doctor, what the devil are you complaining about?"

This seemed to me to be a definite score. During all this time I had frequently pointed to my knee.

"I 'm coming to that," he said.

To make a long story short, I was bidden to drink a medicine which tasted like emulsion of seaweed, to massage with an embrocation like adulterated tar, and to refrain from all intoxicants, especially beer.

"But in this weather, doctor?"

"There's always the pump!" said Dr. Robinson Brown-Jones, as he pocketed my cheque.

I determined to spend the rest of the day at the Oval, and those who saw Hobbs and Sandham make their great stand against Nottingham will remember that watching was thirsty work. The keener the Notts men bowled and fielded, the more brilliantly the Surrey men batted, and the more I perspired out of pure emotion. When, finally, Hobbs was caught at square-leg trying to hit a full pitch out of the ground, I confess that I retired to the refreshment room and ordered a large tumbler and two bottles of beer. Quaffing this to the health of the great batsman and the confusion of the faculty, I had just finished draining it when my eyes met those of my medical adviser over the rim of a tumbler of equal size.

"They're a fine pair," I said nonchalantly.

"I expect Fender will tell Ducat to hit," said the medico, who had suddenly become human. "Shall we sit together?"

It would take too long to tell in detail how we discovered a common hero-worship, how we had tea together, then dinner, and finally adjourned to a music-hall. We spent the evening, I may say, like men and not like valetudinarians.

"You might dine with me on your return from

Scotland," said my new-found friend at parting. "I 've got a Mouton-Rothschild 1907 upon which I should value your opinion. So long, and stick to the massage!"

I wonder what my friend's feelings were when he found on his breakfast table on the following Monday morning a postcard with the mysterious legend: "There 's always the pump!" I wonder if they were at all like mine. My correspondence consisted of a single envelope, containing Dr. Robinson Brown-Jones's compliments, and my own cheque!

. . . . . .

My knee is in working order again. I stuck to the massage.

ON APPROACHING GLENEAGLES

One of the best things of that great letter-writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, is contained in a Samoan postscript: " And, man, of a' 'at ever I saw, I think I never saw the beat o' Tummelside." It reminds me of the reply of the profiteering mill-owner from Wigan who was asked what feature of his world-tour had impressed him most. " Eh, mon," he said, " ah seed a gran' feight on Wiggin Station ! "

Patriotism, in the political sense, may be the scoundrelly thing which Dr. Johnson affirmed it to be; pride of the place in which a man is born is a natural instinct. " If I were not a Frenchman," a gracious ambassador to this country once declared at a banquet, " I should desire to be an Englishman." " And if I were not an Englishman," our blunter representative returned, " by heaven, Mounseer, I should want to be ! "

The poet who demanded to know why, with only one sky above us, we should bother about so many fatherlands and motherlands, had poor knowledge of human nature. I happen to be passionately English, but this does not prevent me, when I am on other soil, from being also passionately Welsh, Irish, or Manx. At the moment, I am fervently, worshipfully Scottish. Hoots, mon, but it 's a bonny country !

On the way up to Gleneagles I tried to enumerate all the things which Scotland has meant to me—and to put them in their proper order. There is no fun in those classic lists which recount what one ought to admire—they make as dull reading as the Hundred Best Books. And therefore I shall say nothing about John Knox, who bores me almost as much as Martin Luther, or Walter Scott, who is one of the giants of the unreadable, or Carlyle, who was a boor. Never have I been able to make anything of haggis or the bagpipes, both of which are equally uneatable. No ! My list shall begin with golf, which I manfully state to have played more part in my life than the plays of Shakespeare.

I would not exchange my bag of clubs, the residue and crystallization of many years of careful selection, for a first folio. St. Andrews is, so far as I am concerned, a more notable shrine than Stratford-on-Avon, and I have found more of the true joy of living on a certain mud-patch at Stockport, Cheshire, than in all the tragedies. Next month I am, for the first time, to see *Titus Andronicus* performed on the stage. This finds me mildly expectant. But to-morrow I am to play my first round at Gleneagles, and, in the knowledge, shall hardly sleep.

After golf I place whisky, and then the songs of Sir Harry Lauder, on whose heels the novels of George Macdonald tread very hard. To be quite frank, I do not think that I shall ever read Scott's *Old Mortality* again. They gave it me once for a holiday-task, and my boyish gorge rises at it still. But I often hanker after *Malcolm* and *Sir Gibbie*, *The Marquis of Lossie* and *Alec Forbes of Howglen*. I have not read these stories for thirty years, but know that I could renew the old rapture. There is no room for more Stevenson in this article. Besides, one takes him for granted, like sun and air.

After Lauder comes Robert Burns. The reader will please remember that this is no academic succession but a purely personal statement. The plain truth is that "Roamin' in the Gloamin'" has given me more pleasure than "The Cotter's Saturday Night." Perhaps this is because I have made more frequent acquaintance with it. I find myself humming Lauder's song at least once a week; it is ten years since I thought of Burns's masterpiece. It is also ten years since I drank Pommery and Greno 1906. That was a noble champagne of a noble year; in the meantime I have drunk innumerable good bottles of Bass. And just as I put Bass above Pommery as a practicable delight, so I put Lauder above Burns. Dr. John Brown's *Marjorie Fleming* is nearly the most exquisite piece of writing in any language, and Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy* is the only book I have ever worn out with reading and re-reading.

Scotland has never had composers or musicians, except of the homelier sort. Yet "Annie Laurie" is still the loveliest ballad in the world. Whenever in a London music-hall its first words strike upon the ear, be sure a hush falls upon the house deeper than that which any English ballad knows. Mendelssohn had the grace not to pretend to Caledonian descent, but there are certain bars in his "Fingal's Cave" overture which move me as much as any concourse of German sounds. And there my list came to an end. We had arrived at the railway station which is within ten miles of the famous links, and had decided to hire a car and cast an eye upon the first tee before nightfall.

Whereupon rational thinking ceased, and we fell to determining, like Jane Austen's Lady Catherine de Burgh, what weather we should have on the morrow. At the moment it was pouring as it can pour in that bonny country alone.

The one thing I dislike about Scotland is its weather. I admit freely that Gleneagles in rain is better than Naples, or any other non-golfing centre, in the heavenliest sunshine. Still, Scotch rain, nothing whatever below proof, is inclined to be depressing. The unco' guid, leaning dejectedly against the wall in their rain-sodden Sunday best, looked to me to be unco' bored. We must all dree our weird, but it is a pity that in Perthshire there should be so little dree and so much weird ! We who love golf, however, can face our destiny.

For us there is to-morrow, Gleneagles, and, I doubt not, a great emotional experience. Perhaps even a spiritual one. Perhaps even a fine day. I cannot sleep, and I write this in my bedroom.

CONCERNING OLD AGE

THERE are two subjects—Death and Old Age—upon which our essayists write an intolerable deal of rubbish. *Pace* Plato, Cicero, and all the ancient crowd whose names end in that doleful vowel, and asking pardon of old fogeys such as Bacon and Montaigne, there is nothing favourable to be said of either that ultimate or penultimate condition towards which all mankind moves at a gallop. Old Age makes one of Shakespeare's joyless catalogue; its fellows are gout, serpigo, and rheum. "Be absolute for death" is nonsense; and nonsense, too, is the craving for Eld. The best that can be said for Old Age is that it is an unendurable state which old men manage, somehow or other, to endure. And endure with considerable equanimity, courage, and even hope. That Old Age should hope seems to me to be the triumph and vindication of the spirit of man. It is a thousand times more significant than the despair of youth, puling romantically for a grave too far away.

During the War I came across a remarkable instance of the hopefulness of Old Age. I am, perhaps, betraying no grave military secret when I say that my duty during that stirring time was to keep the horses of our Near Eastern Army supplied with fodder. There is not a hayfield in sleepy Provence which I did not come to know like the back of my hand, whilst at one time I could reel off the names of all the railway stations between Marseilles and Salonica with fewer mistakes than, as a boy, I could recite the table of the Kings of England. I once calculated that the hay-trucks which I despatched during those four years would, placed end to end, have reached from London to Manchester and back again to Crewe. But that is by the way.

One day when I was sitting in my office in Arles, whose life has not changed since through its streets Hannibal marched his Numidians to the sack of Italy, whose women trace their beauty to Phoenician sailors—one day an old, old man creaked himself with difficulty into my room, and, taking off his hat with a gesture magnificent despite its decrepitude, said :

" Sir, you are the first English officer I have had the pleasure of addressing since Sebastopol."

The old gentleman was the last flowering of one of the ancient families of France. He was a bachelor, and the title would die with him. On his breast he wore two medals—one of which had been awarded him for services during the Crimean War, in which he served as sub-lieutenant.

" And the other ? " I asked.

" I was in charge of the first balloon which was sent up from Paris during the siege of 1870," he replied.

I tried my hand at a compliment.

" You have served your country, mon capitaine," I hazarded.

" Commandant ! " he said sharply. He had come to haggle about the price of his last year's haycrop, carefully garnered against a rise, and was full of hope about the *coupe* now growing, and of complaint that he had been forced to postpone the building of a new house, upon which he had set his heart, until after the War.

" Après la guerre fini," I murmured, in my best soldier-French. " Roll on, peace ! "

" Nous les aurons ! " he said simply. " And then I shall have my new house."

Afterwards he went on to tell me of a new conservatory, and a wonderful system of heating of his own invention.

" If that succeeds, I shall, etc., etc."

One afternoon this week I was taking tea with an old lady of my acquaintance, aged eighty-five, who lives in the New Cut. She boasts—if that is the right word—of having lived in the same house for thirty-seven years, of having entered no place where intoxicating liquor is sold for forty-six years, of being the eldest and last surviving member of a family of eleven, the baby of which family, her youngest brother, she buried at the trifling age of sixty-three. My friend remembers the return of her cousins—two privates and a captain—from the Crimea in 1855 better than the return of her neighbour's sons from France in 1919. She is proud, to this day, of her uncles who fought at Waterloo. But she is prouder still that, when she dies, there will be enough to bury her. What is over is to go to a great-grand-nephew, whom I invariably find playing in the gutter and whose curls are a golden dream in a dull street. For him my old lady lays "monstrous foundations." For him she is flushed with hope.

Shakespeare enumerates amongst the good things which may accompany Old Age, "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends." I cannot say to what extent these privileges were enjoyed by M. le Commandant, le Comte de X——. That old French nobleman struck me, for all his gallantry, as a wintry personage, frosty, and not too kindly. But then I only met him in my official capacity. Whereas I know that the way of life of my old friend of the New Cut has fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf, with all imaginable gentleness. She is honoured by the neighbourhood and has troops of friends, among whom I am proud to count myself. She has all the love that eight-year-old little Charlie can spare from grubbing in the gutter. Whether she has his obedience is another matter.

I often wonder what the end of life must be like for those poor folk who have nothing to look back upon save an infinity of steps washed, floors scrubbed, beds made, and rooms "turned out." Perhaps theirs is the peace which comes with mere cessation from labour. Perhaps, like the old man in the story, sometimes they sit and think, and sometimes they just sit. Perhaps with them Old Age is just an endless Saturday afternoon.

MORE ABOUT OLD AGE

There is a story about a toothless and palsied villager who, denying that he was the oldest inhabitant, referred the stranger to his father.

"And where 's he ?" asked the visitor.

"Upstairs, washing grandpa !"

It is always something of a shock when an elderly acquaintance makes disclosure of two parents, or even of one. Some time ago I spent a week with an old friend, well on the shady side of sixty, who unaccountably slipped away every evening for the hour between nine o'clock and ten. Curiosity getting the better of manners, I asked my friend what was the cause of his absence. He told me, with a somewhat shamefaced air, that his father had been blind and bedridden for the past five years, and that every evening, whatever he was doing, he gave up an hour to the old gentleman, and to reading aloud the novels of Walter Scott. The extent of this filial devotion can only be measured when I say that my friend is an amateur, almost to frenzy, of Meredith, James, and even later schools of English letters. Scott bores him to tears. The picture of an old man, approaching his ninetieth year, blind, bedridden, and dependent upon a son for one hour's daily relief from ennui—this picture gives one to think. Yet it may be that, even at ninety, all is not darkness and tedium, that adventures of the spirit remain.

I remember another son who was in the habit of taking his father, a distinguished man of letters, well over ninety, for a drive in a victoria every Saturday afternoon. On one occasion I accompanied them. The old gentleman appeared to both of us to be very, very old, harder of hearing than usual, and also, it seemed, harder of understanding. For a time my friend babbled the small-talk which he deemed best suited to his father's declining intelligence. Suddenly the old man roused himself, shot a glance of scorn, and said :

" Arthur, you talk like a fool ! If you have nothing intelligent to say, then say nothing ! "

Will the reader forgive another personal experience ? I am privileged to retain the friendship of my father's oldest friend, a singer and singing master of great renown, whose name is world-famous. The maestro is eighty-eight, brisk, hale, and hearty. We were in a 'bus recently, into which clambered, with infinite difficulty, a rheumatic stripling of not more than seventy. My companion laughed his jovial roar, like a lion well pleased, shook a white mane, and in a voice loud enough to be heard of the whole company, said :

" It must be a terrible thing to grow old ! "

That, it seems to me, is the true spirit. It is the spirit of Stevenson's jolly picture of Old Age. The passage which I am going to quote occurs in the essay entitled *Aes Triplex.* I should not be surprised if the whole of this beautiful bit of writing and thinking were found, piecemeal, in these little essays. The justification is that to have written it in my own person I would give all my trumpery concoctions. Now for the passage :

> " By the time a man gets well into the seventies his continued existence is a mere miracle ; and when he lays his old bones in bed for the night there is an overwhelming probability that he will never see the day. Do the old men mind it, as a matter of fact ? Why, no. They were never merrier ; they have their grog at night, and tell the raciest stories ; they hear of the death of people about their own age, or even younger, not as if it were a grisly warning, but with a simple childlike pleasure at having outlived some one else ; and when a draught might puff them out like a guttering candle, or a bit of a stumble shatter them like so much glass, their old hearts keep sound and unaffrighted, and they go on, bubbling with laughter, through years of man's age compared to which the valley at Balaklava was as safe and peaceful as a village cricket-green on Sunday. It may fairly be questioned (if we look to the peril only) whether it was a much more daring feat for Curtius to plunge into the gulf

than for any old gentleman of ninety to doff his clothes and clamber into bed."

My old friend and his doctor are, for the moment, not on the best of terms, the latter having incautiously suggested that at eighty-eight it were a reasonable thing to give up bicycling! This medical man should have been philosopher enough to know that to him who loves life more than he fears death it is never the time to give up anything, and that reason does not enter into the matter!

Some time before Sarah Bernhardt died I remember reading a newspaper paragraph to the effect that the great actress had expressed her intention of appearing during the following season, if she had her health, in a play by Sacha Guitry. That paragraphist lied! What Sarah said was that she would appear *whether she had her health or not.*

I see in all these instances the flame of indomitable courage in the face of Old Age.

> "With wrinckled wimpled forehead let old yeares,
> While we may, be resolv'd to merrie cheere,"

writes old Montaigne, echoing still older Horace. This is the courage which makes a Goethe begin the conquest of a new language at the age of eighty, which sends a Johnson in his sixty-fifth year a-touring in the Hebrides. Stevenson tells us that it is better to lose health like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. The precept applies even more forcibly to our declining years. "By all means begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week. It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honour useful labour. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution which outlives the most untimely ending."

And the most timely ending too. That 's my whole point. If I were a great novelist who had completed my hundredth year and written my hundredth book I should, praying God, set out cheerfully on my hundred and first in both kinds. What says the Preacher? "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED

Vaguely I remember at school poring over a Latin writer who babbled of Old Age. Cicero was the fellow's name, and the whole class thought him rather tosh. But then we didn't believe in the subject ; Old Age seemed a long way off. And now it is here. Or very nearly here. I am going to tell you how I know.

When I was a small boy of six the great event of the year was the holiday by the sea. I can remember the feel and smell, almost the taste, of the red plush lining to the yellow cab which bore us to the station, the excitement which went to the bagging of a window-seat in the train, the ecstatic moving off, the feverish counting of the stations, the mystery of the luncheon basket, the rapture of arrival. I remember the path up to the front door of the lodgings, the hydrangeas in the front garden, the bow-window, the broad smile and bosom, the Welsh welcome of Mrs. Evan Williams. I remember the taste of the butter, the odour and feel of the sheets, the way the little lattice window of my bedroom opened on to Puffin Island and the sea.

And then there was the beach. The first thing was to ascertain about the tides—*i.e.* the hours at which cricket on the sands would be possible, and the last moment for completing one's castle. The next was to renew old acquaintance with the owners of fishing-smacks, and glean news of the shrimping prospects. But I need not go on. You, reader, have launched boats with golden keels and mother-of-pearl sails into seas of tumbling sapphire and diamond spray. You, too, have chased little crabs, wept over a dead starfish, pondered upon the infinite beauty of the common shell, gazed fearfully upon the tribe of Coelenterata, Medusae, and hydroids as they floated stingingly by. Perhaps you have known the horrible delight of vivisecting a jellyfish with a spade! Of a surety you have gazed with rapture upon those Sixth-form heroes sporting incredible blazers, impeccably creased flannels, and boots of an immaculate, dazzling white. Like me, you have thought on the day when you would be able to hit a full-pitch for six beyond the jetty. Like me, you have known contempt for those old gentlemen lolling in the shade of a boat, with their backs to the sea and their bespectacled noses in the financial column of the *Times*. You, too, have known pity for those half-hearted fellows who were obviously afraid to face fast bowling, and would slink away to knock silly little balls into silly little holes on some waste ground remote from the sea. Weakling, craven-spirited folk these ! One decided that they must be old.

Last week a friend blew in and proposed that I should run down with him to the East Coast. He was feeling off-colour, and told me that I was looking jaded. Great Yarmouth was his suggestion.

"If you like," I yawningly assented. "All those places are the same."

We got uninterestingly to Liverpool Street and chose seats in the train less with regard to the view than to the absence of the draught. We toyed with a five-course lunch, and played piquet. As for counting the stations, I can only say that I do not know whether we went via Cambridge or Ipswich, or both. We spent an hour or so deciding upon our hotel. After dinner my friend went off to a picture-palace to see Nazimova in *Salome.* I made inquiries about the golf courses in the neighbourhood, wrote some letters, and went to bed early.

I have to confess that throughout the whole of that week I did not once put my foot upon the sea-shore. Not a toe and not a finger did I dip into that uncomfortable, unnecessary sea. Not a castle did I construct. What a waste of land for building sites ! Once, whilst I was sitting on a cheerless form on the front trying to discover what Ooboolulu

Tea and Rubber Estates had done during the previous week, a cricket ball hit me full in the chest, and I heard a shrill voice crying, "That 's four! The old bloke counts same as a boundary!" I confess that I found myself thinking that there is a proper place for cricket, and that that place is not the sea-shore. . . .

I had some very enjoyable games of golf, principally with the local professional, who conceded me six bisques without difficulty. Once I found the very top of my form, and, getting round in 74, or one under par, beat the pro.

And now I know that I am getting old. I shall probably never beat a professional golfer again, and I know that it really won't matter if I don't. Whereas, when I was the age of the small boy who counts old gentlemen as boundaries, it mattered enormously whether I made 20 runs on the sand or only 19. But it will matter tremendously what Ooboolulu does in the way of rise or fall. Yes, I am old. . . .

. . . . . .

Lest the reader be too greatly depressed, let me declare that most of the foregoing is a lie. It is true that I went to Yarmouth and played one magnificent round. But it is untrue that I care anything at all about Ooboolulu shares. I haven't got any, and they can go to £1000 or drop to 9d. for all I care. What happened when the kid hit me was that I joined the game, bowled him and his side out, and scored 46 off my own bat, *all run.*

Curiously enough, forty-six will be my age to-morrow, and *the first part of the above is the forecast of an article I shall try NOT to write in thirty years' time.* Whatever age I may be I shall always knock off the tens. Six is the proper age for a man. I have always been six, and six I intend to remain. Here let me solemnly set down that, last week at Yarmouth, I spent one whole morning paddling, and one whole afternoon in building a sand-castle. And what a castle! Castles in Spain and castles in sand—there are no others!

MORE STEVENSON

A GREAT critic has said that the world is never the same place for a man after he has read Balzac. Even the scullions, a still greater critic has said, have brains. We must think that something of this power of transmutation was vested in Robert Louis Stevenson. Read him, and henceforth there 's a rainbow in your sky. Even his cut-throats have charm. And yet I suppose there is no author who has been quite so much overrated. Every good bookworm has a bee in his bonnet. There was a time when Mr. George Moore was teased by Balzac ; Aristotle and Jane Austen have long kept company in the coif of Mr. Walkley ; the novels of Marcel Proust have settled upon the brow of Chelsea like a swarm. But the bee which most persistently haunts the plain man is Robert Louis Stevenson.

Was R. L. S. a great writer ? Yes and no ! It all depends upon what we mean by "great." I would rather say that he was a second-rate writer, and I counter your immediate protest with the explanation that "second-rate" is very high rank indeed. *Treasure Island* is a magnificent boys' story—I read it once every year—but *Robinson Crusoe* is better. *Catriona*—but it would be a dull business to point out in detail that Fielding was a greater novelist, Lamb a neater essayist, Shelley a purer poet. Stevenson was a Jack of all these trades, and a little master in all.

The above was written some months ago, and was the beginning of an essay which I have now abandoned. The decision came upon me at Gleneagles, one day when it was quite too wet for golf. We had gone motoring in the Highlands, and had stopped for lunch at a little inn in the heart of Perthshire. The day was gusty and raw; now the heavens would open wrathfully, and now the sun would send a ray like a burst of human song. Waterfalls and rills fell chattering to the river which grumbled in a peaty swirl, and the fishermen in the hotel lounge said that life was good. What the fish thought I had no means of knowing. Idly I turned the leaves of a motor guide, and idly read the lines addressed to S. R. Crockett, "on receiving a dedication." You remember the little poem—all about the blowing wind, the flying sun and rain, the whaups crying round the martyrs' graves. Some such grey and sunshot day as that now at our door must have been in Stevenson's home-sick mind. I read on :

" Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,
Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor,
Hills of sheep, and the howes of the silent vanished races,
And winds, austere and pure :

" Be it granted to me to behold you again in dying,
Hills of home ! and to hear again the call ;
Hear about the graves of the martyrs the peewees crying,
And hear no more at all."

When I had finished I found that I was—well, very near to crying. And I decided that my essay on the second-rateness of Robert Louis Stevenson should remain unfinished.

I left my friend's motor-car at Stirling, and took train south. At the bookstall I asked for all the London papers—a journalist is always famished for news — and any one of the monthly magazines. The attendant handed me the August number of the *Empire Review*. And there, to my infinite delight, I came across the third and last instalment of some hitherto unpublished letters, written by young Stevenson to Lady Colvin in the 'seventies. It is not enough to say that I read them ; in each the boy—for he was little more—ached and sang, and I must do likewise.

Arrived in London, my first thought was to obtain the complete series. They are before me now They show that if ever man wore heart upon his sleeve, that man was R. L. S. He wore there not only heart but everything else—ill-health, the dull quarrels with his father about religion, his petulance and high spirits, his gloom and abounding joy, his many friendships and rare enmities, his despair and his trust in God. He laid all his youthful sorrows in the lap of her whom he called "mother" and "madonna," as, later, he was to lay his head on the knee of every one of his readers. I shall not have space to quote much. The quintessential Stevenson seems to me to speak in this passage, written on board a yacht at Oban :

> "I believe in the future faithfully. I am fully content and fear nothing, not death, nor weakness, nor any falling away from my own standard and yours. I shall be a man yet, and a good man, although day by day I see more clearly by how much I still fall short of the mark of our high calling ; in how much I am still selfish and peevish and a spoiled child. You will see that I am writing out of a great blackness. . . . We lie here in a good roadstead, and so do I in my own constancy. Let the wind blow!"

Has any one noticed how great a lover Stevenson was of the wind ? It soughs throughout his pages, and never the night is still. But these letters are not all melancholy. He talks delightfully of music. A symphony of Mozart is "of the colour and scent of rose-leaves." Cherubini's Overture to *Anacreon* is of the colour of green bronze. Glinka is "better than gold, and the breath of man's nostrils."

There is fun to be found here, too, and over against it a curious note of self-disparagement which it has become the fashion for some critics to take seriously. He is writing from Mentone. "The weather was grey and blustering, as it might have been in Edinburgh, and I went labouring up and down the beach in the wind, and in a passion with myself—at least a sort of sham passion, a little froth on the top of a great dead-sea of discouragement."

Yet whenever I am depressed I find that I turn instinctively to that essay in *Virginibus Puerisque*, entitled *Aes Triplex*. For all his effeminacy—pass me the word, idolaters—Stevenson's heart was bound in brass. The sum of this writer's work is that nowhere, within our knowledge, has God created a finer thing than the Spirit of Man. No other writer, not even Shakespeare, has given me so abiding an impression. The prophets of the Old Testament embraced Death; Stevenson ran with outstretched arms towards Life. That is his testament, and I will not call it second-rate.

SMALL "ADS."

Years ago one of our then halfpenny papers offered a prize for suggestions as to the best way of spending a million pounds. "Garn!" was my unsuccessful solution. It was like those discussions in a Bridge column asking what B should declare, holding Spades: Ace, King, Queen, Knave, ten; Hearts: Ace, King, Queen, Knave; Diamonds: Ace, Knave; Clubs: Ace, ten. I am as likely to have a million pounds as to hold this hand. Now if it had been a thousand pounds!

You see, I once nearly did have a thousand pounds. An old aunt who lived in the country had heard the best reports of her nephew in town, and had put me down for that sum in her will. She lay, regrettably, dying. Shall I confess that I scanned the advertisement columns in the daily Press with a new interest and a new wonder? On Monday I read:

LEAD A HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER life at Orang-Outang, the premier Banana-growing Estate in South America. Life there is described as delightful by the families who reside in the picturesque township, situated at an altitude of 4000 feet, overlooking the orchards. Congenial society, varied sports; no pioneering; plentiful and inexpensive native labour for field and house work; taxation negligible. Write at once for particulars as to how an investor or settler may secure 10 acres ensuring a net income of not less than £1000 per annum on a capital outlay of £1350, etc., etc.

Well, that was somewhere near my figure, but who, o' God's name, wants to spend his life in a swamp singing, "No! we have some bananas," and suffering from prickly heat?

On Tuesday I read that an "Old Etonian (Clergyman's son) could recommend"

SPLENDID MACARONI-GROWING proposition in ex-enemy country. Applicants must be of good social standing. Capital required, £2000. Full particulars from P. Pillicody, Box 4982, Seringapatam.

On Wednesday I noted an

UNDERTAKER'S BUSINESS FOR SALE. Twenty coffins a week. Could be increased. Unhealthy district. Suit "live" man. £2300, including fixtures, trestles, urns, caskets, etc.

On Thursday:

DETECTIVE AGENCY FOR SALE. Ill-health only cause. County connection. Goodwill £6000. Family skeletons at valuation.

On Friday:

AN ENGINEERING FIRM (Limited Company) have vacancy for a competent secretary. Salary £400. Must be prepared to invest £2000 in 7½ per cent. Cumulative Participating Preference Shares. Unique opportunity. No agents. Solicitor's and accountant's references exchanged. Write, etc., etc.

But I did not "see" investing five years' salary in shares, however cumulative, participating, and preferential.

Then there were the boarding-houses and residential hotels, anxious to dispose of dining-room, drawing-room, lounge, 22 bedrooms, furniture, plate, glass, linen, piano, clientele, and servants for £3000 (£2000 could remain). I interviewed innumerable harpies with golden hair, voice and smile, crackling bosoms, and a husband claiming to be a retired naval officer. Books were produced showing that those twenty-two bedrooms had invariably sheltered twenty married couples and two bachelors—forty-two guests in all—that these had eaten, drunk, and slept at an unvarying weekly profit of £21. In each case only the necessity for dear William, Charles, or Richard to breathe once more the air of his beloved sea, and the fortunate opportunity arising to purchase a small business at Worthing, could have induced so great a sacrifice as the contemplated sale. So swore in turn each golden-haired ghoul.

I spent £10 in advance of fortune in looking fully into one of these desirable properties. A close inspection revealed that the furniture, plate, linen, etc., were worth, at a lavish estimate, £600 ; that the lease of the house came to an end in less than two years, when there were expensive repairs to be done ; that the place was being run at a loss ; that the landlady carried her clientele about with her from hotel to hotel, keeping them below cost to dress her bow-windows. She was, not to mince matters, "on a good thing," having made six moves in just over four years. I discovered that on three occasions her unfortunate victims had completed their purchases with a net profit to her of some £2000. On the other three, the purchaser had lost his all, the lady of the golden voice brassily resuming possession. Linden Gardens, Cleveland Gardens, Pembridge Gardens, Cromwell Gardens—all Bayswater, and a great part of Notting Hill, were riddled by that captivating and predatory couple, Captain and Mrs. Wilberforce Hurry. I do not say that there are no honest proprietors of residential hotels. I struck unlucky—that is all.

Then there were the smaller advertisements, which sounded incredibly, marvellously genuine, but did not take up all my available capital. At first some of them were as difficult to solve as an acrostic, but with a trifle of perseverance one arrived at a solution.

> CONF., TOB., STAT., NEWS (Good-class), mn. rd., d.-f. shop, 5 rms., scull., sm. gdn., easy rt., tde. £60 p.w., vac. poss., s.a.v., snip, £550. Buggins and Biggleswade, 865 Belladonna Rd., N.W.17.

Certainly, if I had decided to become a stationer

I should have preferred to sell nothing but good-class news.

FISH (Wet, Dry, Fried), Camberwell, 4 rooms, all vacant, smokehole, no rent, £450 all at.

Sounded attractive, only I could not lay my hand on my heart and swear to an exact knowledge of the difference between a wet fish and a dry one. As the song says, all fish look alike to me.

Then there was a

VILLAGE STORES in Sussex, situated in a lov. spt., with a nce. hse. and cnr. shop, no rts. and lge. gdn., tde. £18, proof, abt. £350, cause death.

It was the last two words which frightened me.

I had almost decided to invest my thousand pounds in a schooner which was to sail in search of buried treasure left by the buccaneers in the Caribbean Sea, when my aunt, most happily, recovered.

I was foolish enough to "cut" two of her week-end parties in succession.

The old lady died last year, and in her will left me a Queen Anne silver teapot which, in the way of legacies, is the perfect Yarborough. To the Dogs' Home she bequeathed £1000.

RECOVERED TREASURE

Macaulay, I am told, has a passage concerning the unreadableness of school prizes. This may be so, but I am not going to pretend that I remember it. A wit once said that if each member of a cultivated dinner-party would confess to a classical masterpiece which he or she had not read, the nucleus of a standard library could be formed. So I will let his lordship go at that.

Certain it is that my school prizes were unreadable. What, for instance, did I get for "ascertained proficiency in geography"? The answer is Wallace's *Geographical Distribution of Animals.* That I was not an utter fool at elementary science won for me a treasure entitled *Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms*, by Charles Darwin. A certain ability in demanding to know, in French, what my aunt has done with the pen, ink, and note-paper of my grandfather earned for me six volumes of the *Origins of Contemporary France*, by that priceless idiot—or so I considered him on that prize-giving morning—Hippolyte Adolphe Taine. (Fancy giving a schoolboy aged fourteen, who plays with a straight bat and rather fancies his slow ball that whips across, a book by a writer called Hippolyte !)

The knack of demanding from the gardener, in German, information as to the whereabouts of my uncle's watering-can and my grandmother's goloshes brought me the complete works of that obsequious ass, Schiller. They had bound this fellow in two volumes of expensive calf, whereas what my soul longed for was a pair of skeleton pads, or, if it must be printed stuff, then a complete *Lillywhite's Cricketer's Companion and Guide.*

My school prizes were, in a word, the sort of thing which Charles Lamb calls books and yet no books. So when, six months ago, I moved to my present flat, I decided that they must be discarded. *You cannot drag* 1500 *volumes all over London*, from a garret in Kennington to an attic in Maida Vale, from a cellar in Bloomsbury to a combined room in the Portobello Road. I have done it, and I know. Henceforth, I determined on my last change of roof, my peregrinations should be comparatively untrammelled, my library a limited one of 1000 volumes and no more.

I took an obliging second-hand bookseller into my confidence, and to him despatched Darwin, Wallace, Schiller, and the egregious Hippolyte, together with some 490 other volumes excogitated by learned bores. In return my banking account was enriched—anglice, my overdraft reduced—by the sum of £5. It was not until some weeks afterwards that I discovered that, by some fell and fiendish mischance, I had slipped in among the rubbish my priceless first edition of *A Shropshire Lad.* Appeals to my bookseller were in vain. It was this volume which had extracted, he said, so huge a cheque from so poor a pocket as his. The rest of my books he had sold by the pound weight, presumably for pulp. Well, it was some consolation to know that Hippolyte was pulp. Vain, miserable Hippolyte! And Schiller, too. Smug, smooth-faced Schiller! Darwin also. Back, old worm, to your own vegetable mould! Canst work in that ground so fast? Wallace as well. Pulp, all pulp!

Some little time afterwards I received a letter from a clergyman in Kent. He had, he said, whilst rummaging in the 2d. box of a Maidstone bookseller come across a volume "Presented to James Agate in 1891 for ascertained proficiency in Science." Might he . . . ? Would I be offended if . . . ? He was forwarding, care of my editor, the book, the theft or loss of which must have pained me deeply. He begged that I would not refund. The postage was immaterial. Next day, on my immaculate breakfast table, were the worms of the never-to-be-shaken-off Charles Darwin.

Six weeks passed, and then one morning I received the following :

> " Hard up again, old sport, I suppose ? Anyhow, I 've rescued your Taine for you. Fished him up in a bookshop at Chepstow. Was really hunting for something about trout. They won't look at any of my flies. Cheerio ! —Tom."

When I came home at night Hippolyte gazed reproachfully at me from all his six volumes.

The next morning there arrived a most suspicious-looking parcel, the very thickness, height, and weight of Schiller. But I was wary, opened him not, and let him lie. A month later came a wire from an enraged editor : " Where is review of *The Horse in Saddle and Harness* sent you month ago ? If tired of job say so."

Only once has a parcel turned up which could have conceivably enshrined my lost masterpiece. With beating heart I opened it. It was a volume of sonnets to Hobbs, Hitch, Strudwick and some others, entitled *Surrey's Cracks.* Enclosed was a letter from " Ovalite " asking my critical opinion upon his little work.

A FORGOTTEN AUTHORESS

A FEW evenings ago a smart young fellow, dressed up to the nines, swaggered into the private bar and demanded of the young lady behind the counter whether she could oblige him with a glass of "decent champagne." This was swank, and swank of so outrageous a nature that it provoked a protest from a lounger in the corner.

"Come orf it, George," was the form the protest took. "Don't talk so wrist-watch!"

One of the most persistent forms of swank is the literary sort. Journalists habitually use it in the sense that they will not employ a word of one syllable if they can find one of three. Say that a child has been bitten by a rat. Do they head their account, "Rat Bites Baby"? No. The story appears under the heading, "Voracious Rodent Devours Sleeping Infant." The point about this journalistic swank is that it is really modesty. It is the feeling which prompts the good housewife to dust a chair for her visitor. Journalists do not swank out of conceit, but out of politeness; they do but seek to dust the language which they offer to their readers.

Round about Shakespeare's time English literature had a bad attack of this complaint, brought on at the instigation of one Lyly. *Love's Labour's Lost* is founded upon the absurdity of calling a spade an "agricultural implement." But even present-day writers have not been immune. Sir Arthur Pinero, if my memory serves me rightly, makes Filmer Jesson, in the play of *His House in Order*, say to his brother, "Your remarks, dear Hilary, partake too much of the nature of invective to admit of a moderate reply." To which, of course, Hilary's answer should have been: "Come off it, Filmer; don't talk so wrist-watch!"

The other day I came across a book which, I suppose, must be one of the rarest in the language. It is called *Irene Iddesleigh*, and was written some time in the 'nineties by Mrs. Amanda Ros, the wife of the station-master at Larne. The book has long been out of print and is much sought after by collectors. Those who are fortunate enough to possess a copy keep it chained to its shelf like an old-fashioned Bible. It is written throughout in a vein of utmost magnificence, before which Lyly, Bulwer, Disraeli, and even Ouida pale their ineffectual fires. The opening paragraph sounds a trumpet-note unheard in our literature since Lyly's *Euphues*.

"Sympathise with me, indeed! Ah, no! Cast your sympathy on the chill waves of troubled waters; fling it on the oases of futurity; dash it against the rock of gossip; or, better still, allow it to remain within the false bosom of buried scorn. Such were a few remarks of Irene as she paced the beach of limited freedom."

The story is concerned with the marriage of Sir John Dunfern, of Dunfern Mansion, to Irene, adopted daughter of Lord and Lady Dilworth, of Dilworth Castle. When the tale proper begins we find Sir John feeling "a trifle chilly." Instead of ordering more coal to be put on the fire, he

> "requested that his favourite apartment should be made bright as possible by adding more fuel to the smouldering ashes within the glistening bars which guarded their remains."

This done,

> "three huge lamps were lighted and placed at respectable distances from each other, when Sir John, with his accustomed grace, began to peruse some of his evening papers."

The trouble is that Irene accepted Sir John whilst loving Oscar Otwell, her tutor. It was at a ball that her ladyship's secret was disclosed.

> "Yet, when the merriment was at its height, and the heat too oppressive to allow much comfort to the corpulent, the espoused of Irene dropped unexpectedly out of the midst of the aristocratic throng, and being passionately an admirer of the fairy-like fruits of the horticulturist, directed his footsteps towards the well-filled conservatory. There, on a wire couch, he beheld the object of his pursuit in closest

conversation with her tutor, whose name he had altogether failed to remember, only having had the pleasure of his acquaintance a few hours before."

Space will not permit me to do more than outline the course of this wrist-watch tragedy. Sir John upbraids the lady in terms jewelled in every hole :

> " I, as you see, am tinged with slightly snowy tufts, the result of stifled sorrow and care concerning you alone ; and on the memorable day of our alliance, as you are well aware, the black and glossy locks of glistening glory covered my brow."

Irene snaps her gold hunter in his lordship's face :

> " You may not be aware of the fact that I, whom you insinuate you wrested from beggary, am the only child of the late Colonel Iddesleigh, who fell a victim to a gunshot wound inflicted by the hand of his wife, who had fallen into the pit of intemperance."

Sir John is not long in winning a costly tombstone of towering height. Seeking this, his repentant widow is discovered by her son, who, too, was a visitor to the churchyard. He apostrophizes her thus :

> " How darest thou set foot on the premises your chastity should have protected and secured ? What wind of transparent touch must have blown its blasts of boldest bravery around your poisoned person and guided you within miles of the mansion I proudly own ? "

And in good set terms he banishes his erring mother for ever :

> " Woman of sin and stray companion of tutorism, arise, I demand you, and strike across that grassy centre as quickly as you can, and never more make your hated face appear within these mighty walls ! "

Well might we shout, " Whaur 's your John Lyly noo ? "

HIS BETTERS

Every soldier will tell you that his first job on "getting his ticket"—*i.e.* on his return to civil life—will be to let the old Sergeant-Major know exactly what he has always thought of him. Mr. Eric Horne has got his cheque "after fifty-seven years in service with the nobility and gentry," and in *What the Butler Winked At* now lets all his former employers know what he has always thought of them. How Thackeray would have enjoyed this philosophical treatise written by Jeames himself! The publishers have adhered strictly to the original style and spelling.

Well, the Sergeant-Major still sleeps easily o' nights, in spite of the awful threatenings whispered around his head, and I do not suppose that the nobility and gentry will lose a wink owing to these fearsome indiscretions. Yet Mr. Horne pinks them very neatly. No man is a hero to his valet, but the point of this book is that he who keeps a man should not be less than one himself. Or woman either. Take that case of the hostess whose departing visitor had forgotten to tip the chambermaid. Remembering, the guest stopped his motor-car, ran back and gave his hostess ten shillings. She—mean and calculating soul—gave the servant five shillings as from the visitor, and, later, two half-crowns as coming from two of her poor relations !

It is news to me that tips for the housemaid are usually left under the pillow of the bed. Mr. Horne should know ; and that in all my visiting I have never left a penny-piece under a pillow may perhaps mean no more than that my hosts have not been noble. The dressing-table 's the place. That great authority, Miss Daisy Ashford, is firm on my side. Does she not tell us that Rosalind, the housemaid, blushed as Mr. Salteena silently put 2s. 6d. on the dirty toilet cover ? Does not that gentleman, on another occasion, whisper to Ethel Monticue that the right thing is to leave 2s. 6d. for the footman also ? " Does he find it ? " Ethel asks, to be told, " I beleeve so replied Mr. Salteena anyhow it is quite the custom and we can't help it if he does not." It seems to me that this single half-crown must raise difficulties as between butler and housemaid.

Mr. Horne gives his late employers suitable pseudonyms, and introduces us to a Bold Bad Baron, a Sir Henry Cayenne, and a Sir Grizzle de Bluster. His story might be described as a pilgrimage from one unbeautiful house to another. He remembers the days when employers ran their eyes over their servants as though they were cattle :

> " There used to be an old titled lady in Eaton Place who was very proud of her two tall match footmen. When she was engaging them she would make them walk backwards and forwards across the room to see if she liked their action, just as though she was buying a horse."

And the aristocracy wonders why, every hundred years or so, the people get busy with halter and guillotine.

But if the servants were driven cattle, it was their masters who were dumb :

> ' I never knew his lordship speak to an under servant. He was never known to speak in the House of Lords but once : then he said to an attendent : ' Will you please shut that window ? ' "

Alas, that Mr. Horne should have so poor an opinion even of our elected rulers ! " Sir Grizzle was a typical member of Parliament, with the brains of a rabbit." It is interesting to read that footmen must say " Sir " to the butler. The truth of the matter, dear Mr. Horne, is that all men are not equal. It is not for nothing that the private " sirs " his Company Sergeant-Major, or that, at the Depot, the recruit stands at attention to a trained soldier.

Our author enjoys not only present jibes, but the recollection of old scores fully paid. Gentry, he tells us, who are silent before the British-born, are partial to foreign servants, and will chatter to them for hours on end. Mr. Horne thinks this must be to keep their languages from getting rusty, though the foreign servant may have no notion of what his employers are jabbering about.

There is a delightful account of a charity concert, at which a call was made on the butler's excellent tenor voice :

> " The concert began by one of the ladies showing them how well she could play the piano. Then one or two songs and duets about the moon and love mixed. When it drew near my turn I began to ' make up.' Of course, I was simply ignored by the gentry behind the scenes. I thought to myself, after all that milk and water I will give you something stronger. I had a pair of check trowsers, a white top hat with black band, a good false moustache, black coat with button-hole, white spats, and a cane, not forgetting the rouge. I sang my best, I never sang a song on a stage better ; it was serio-comic, and I fancy rubbed the gentry up the wrong way in parts. With a few dance steps and a trick or two, I simply ' brought down the house.' "

The gentry held a consultation, *and would not let him go on again.*

On the whole this book is a little too bitter. One does not believe in the existence of an aristocracy which is wholly ungentle. Some of the gentry must be the best china, and some of the servants may be but indifferent earthenware. Yet one agrees with the whole drift of the book, which is that we are all common clay. After all, Mr. Horne justifies "our betters" when he says that he is neither Conservative nor Liberal, but just what a life lived amongst the aristocracy has made him. He is a good fellow, to judge by his book. Perhaps it may amuse him, in the evening of his days, to look into Mr. Wells's *Tono Bungay* and compare the housekeeper's room at Bladesover. Perhaps, of all readers, he will most appreciate: "After Company, I remember, came anxious days, for the poor old women upstairs were left tired and cross and vindictive, and in a state of physical and emotional indigestion after their social efforts."

AT A SUNDAY CONCERT

Why are Majors unmusical?

The rank, said a very great poet, is not necessarily the guinea-stamp. But I will go further and say that it may be a positive disqualification. Soldiers, in the mass, are essentially musical; I have known unutterable scallywags stick to an upturned bucket, when some gramophone was playing "Souvenir," as though it were a stall in Heaven. But Majors are not moved by concourse of sweet sounds. There is only one man on earth less musical than a Major, and that is his Colonel.

> "I like to know the butcher paints,
> The baker rhymes for his pursuit . . ."

says Browning, or words to that effect. But he was careful to say nothing about the Army officer. A Major with a mouth-organ, a Colonel breathing into the pipes of Pan—go to!

These reflections were suggested by the appearance outside the Queen's Hall one Sunday afternoon of a man who was unmistakably a Major in the Guards. He was well over six feet in height, and had obviously been turned out by a bâtman. (No civilian valet knows that dodge about soaping the creases in his master's trousers and keeping them under his own mattress.) As the Major paced to and fro, wearing his most orderly-room air, I trembled for the swaddy who should be brought up before him next morning through being ten minutes "pushed"—late, that is, to barracks. Three days' "C.B." must be the most merciful of his fate. The cause of the Major's displeasure was the same as mine. We were both five minutes "pushed" for M. Cortot's piano recital, and the house was full. What a programme! The "Moonlight" Sonata of Beethoven, the four Chopin Ballades, the Kinderscenen of Schumann, and Liszt's Mephisto Waltz and No. 2 Rhapsody.

There was not a seat to be had—not even for ready money, as the butler in the play remarked about the cucumbers. The Major was evidently a sticker, and I imagined him hoping against hope that some old lady, seized with a fainting fit, might vacate her seat. But the chance being a slender one, I decided to make for the new series of Popular Concerts at the Philharmonic Hall.

As I arrived, a singer was informing her audience that

"It sometimes comes into my head
That we may dream when we are dead. . . ."

This is a point which has not escaped the attention of several metaphysicians and philosophers—Hamlet, for one. But he, you remember, was of the opinion that our dreams, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, may very well turn out to be nightmares. And I judge, from the general colour and tenor of his remarks on the subject, that he estimated the odds in favour of that melancholy view as slightly better than seven to four on. But it was the burden of the lady's song which interested me. Given the power to dream, she declared—or, better, the song-writer declared for her—that

> " I shall for ever dream of you ! "

It is to be presumed that this was not one of those songs which may be sung by a lady or a gentleman indifferently. The conclusion was essentially feminine. Love, we have the best of poetical assurances, is to a man only a part of life ; whereas 'tis woman's whole existence. And her whole existence, to judge by this singer, not only in this world, but in the next also.

Speaking as a man, I have more complicated views as to our future activities, if any. Heaven, to me, is not going to be Heaven if I find my interests curtailed. For my part I dream of a Valhalla in which not only I but everybody and everything else will get his, hers, and its second chance. I dream of a Stadium larger than Wembley Park, and better managed, where all the Cup Finals that have ever been shall be fought all over again. Where it shall once more be 1896, and again lion-hearted Tom Richardson will take up the bowling against Australia wanting 125 to win. I dream that it shall again be that year in which England wanted 8 to win, with Tate to go in. This time it will not rain, and the Sussex bowler will not have to endure that half-hour wait which destroyed his nerve and England's hope. I do not know that I insist upon that subsequent match at the Oval being replayed, when, on a sodden pitch, Jessop made 104 runs out of 139 in an hour and a quarter, and England won by one wicket. Luck might not be with us at a second venture. I dream of return matches against the Frenchman, with an unhypnotized Wells and Beckett. Even Tishy . . .

My meditations were cut short at this point by the applause which signified that the song was at an end. Three times had the singer asseverated that she would dream of none but him.

The reader has forgotten the Major? So had I. But in the interval I caught sight of his broad shoulders; he had evidently given up hopes of his faint old lady, and like me had sought the next best. I judged his mood, as far as one may tell by the set of a military back, to be something softened. How could it have been otherwise? Music hath charms to soothe the most savage of Seconds-in-Command.

As we left the Hall I caught sight of his countenance. Its expression had become almost human. Perhaps the Guardsman who was to find himself "pushed" that evening would after all escape with the single word, "Admonished!"

MY RAILWAY-STATION

Everybody, I suppose, knows that sensation of having uttered the words which he is now speaking years ago, or in a previous existence, of awaiting a familiar reply and making an old rejoinder. Scientists explain this by saying that the memory nerve has got into temporary contact with the nerve of present apprehension, in the way, I suppose, in which telephone wires become entangled. But then, science was always a depressing business, and scientists were always creatures of disillusion. Give me the poets. Give me the man who can sing :

> " Thy voice is like to music heard ere birth,
> Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea ;
> Thy face remembered is from other worlds,
> It has been died for, though I know not when,
> It has been sung of, though I know not where."

But besides this matter of the familiar word I have the same fancy with regard to certain pictures. It may be when I am " doing " some fine gallery, or pretending to be a possible purchaser of a West End dealer's swagger canvases, or gazing into the window of a humble print-seller, that my senses come to a halt.

Wherever I may be, I forget the imaginary present, and know only that I am living in some actual past, and that the figures around me, or in the street outside, are but shadows.

One day, about a month ago, as I was walking along the street, something stirred in my brain, and a voice said, " Go back! Go back, and look into that shop-window which you have just passed. There is something in it for you!" I was not conscious of having passed an art dealer's, but I went back. One picture seemed to leap from its fellows and claim my eye. It was a drawing in water-colour entitled: " Railway-station in Rutland." What nonsense! I had never been in Rutland in my life, yet that little wayside station was as familiar to me as the back of my hand.

I knew the sweep of white road which climbs and climbs from the village half a mile below. As you turn to pay your cabman—Old Tom from the White Hart—you make a calculation for the thousandth time. No, not as to the fare—that has always been half a crown, for the gradient is steep. What you compute once more is the relative height of the station platform and the church-steeple. The platform, you decide, has it by a foot. Trains are infrequent in this tiny portion of the world, and the moment chosen by the artist is half-past four on a hot afternoon in late July. You judge this not so much by the clock, which may be wrong, but by the shadows, which cannot lie, or could not, in the days when I knew the village of Sleepy Hollow, and legislators had not taken to themselves the powers of Joshua, and called that piece of vanity "Daylight Saving." I hope it is not impious to say so, but I firmly believe that "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon," would not have made a second's difference to the time in Sleepy Hollow.

Look at my old friends. Are they the sort to be gammoned by a parcel of law-givers sitting in London where, it is well known, the sun never shows his face? Look at the Mayor in the foreground. He is the biggest miller, corn-factor, and horse-dealer you shall find in the seven villages. He is buying some tons of hay from Martin Filldyke, who looks even more despondent than is customary with that pessimistic farmer. There is ten shillings a ton between them. Both know that the difference will be split, but time hangs on their hands, and they may as well while it away in argument. Are these men whom you can persuade of high noon when the sun has obviously an hour's further climb before him? It is now half-past four; they will not clinch the bargain till five, when the afternoon train is due. In the meantime the grey horse, which brought a passenger for the four o'clock and waits to take a chance one back, nods over his nosebag. Old Tom mends his whip—it was broken in my day. The booking clerk, porter, and general factotum tends his plants in the tiny embankment garden. If you could look in at the window of the stationmaster's cottage you would behold an interior to gladden an English heart—the good man, his wife, and two apple-cheeked boys sitting down to a new-baked loaf, primrose butter, golden honey, watercress, and eggs laid within the hour.

To the right a little path leads to a white gate, upon which is written, in black letters, the word "Private." This leads to the Hall. First comes a shrubbery through which, if you like, you may stroll and peep. I can hear the faint click of the croquet-balls, and I know that presently, as soon as the players hear the whistle from the approaching train, they will go in to tea. They are ladies, and wear the quaint costumes of the 'eighties. This is not in the picture, but I know!

When I came to my senses I entered the shop. In my smallest voice I begged to be acquainted with the price. I do not know how much picture-dealers make out of the canvases which they sell. Judging by the faultless coat and immaculate linen, the patent-leather boots, the eyeglass and generally superior air of the gentleman who deigned to utter "forty guineas," as who should say a mere flea-bite —judging by this fellow, I put the commission at twenty-five per cent. Say ten guineas for his commission. Well, you can say it, but that doesn't help. I could not afford the commission, let alone the picture. And I had a moral right to it. It was, you see, my railway-station !

I passed the shop yesterday : the picture was gone. Three hopes I have. First, that the artist did not sell. Second, that in his disappointment he has thrown it into some corner of neglect, face to the wall. Third, that he sees these lines.

For the picture, by every moral and spiritual right, is mine, and the wall is prepared.

A NIGHT WITH THE GREEN ROOM CLUB

If it wasn't acting for acting's sake, it was jolly near it. Doubtless some actors' charity was to benefit, and quite rightly too. There is no warmer-hearted body than "the profession." It is generous, as the saying goes, "to a fault"; even to the crime of backing up silly duchesses in woolly schemes for comforting Central Africa with mufflers. Yet though the performance was in aid of orphanage or hospital, the salient thing about it was that it was given by actors to an audience composed entirely of their own kind.

Or almost entirely. I detected one other dramatic critic besides myself, and one only. Now, whilst I cannot speak for that other Mr. Snake-in-the-Grass, I can truthfully say that, for my own part, the invitation to be present was one of the most delicate compliments I have ever known. It was more than a compliment, it was an act of comradeship. It recognized the fact that I, too, in my own way, on the other side of the curtain, am a man of the theatre, and take delight in it as much when I am off duty as when I am chained to my stall.

How does it feel to be a critic in a gathering of actors? The question reminds me of Horne Tooke, who on one occasion found himself the sole layman at a dinner-party of the clergy. "How did you feel among the parsons?" he was asked. "Like a lion in a den of Daniels!" replied the wit. So I felt, that Sunday evening, at the Little Theatre.

Actors notoriously make the best audience. This is perhaps because, unconsciously, they live up to the motto of "Do as you would be done by!" A distressed heroine has only to droop her lip, and your actor, beholding her, will weep a bucketful. A comedian has only to make half a joke, and it is applauded as though to Touchstone had been added Bully Bottom.

I do not suggest that the excellence of Sunday's performance depended upon the particular nature of the audience. On the contrary, I say that this little impromptu revue, got up and managed by the actors themselves, was three times more brainy and more amusing than that offered by the managers to the general public.

There is an old legend of a wandering juggler who, wishing to make an offering and lacking the wherewithal, was found standing on his hands before the High Altar and keeping three balls in the air with his feet. The poor fellow had only his art to give. I am in the same case, and can offer the Green Room Club no return for their delightful hospitality save this poor screed. But such thanks as this slight account of the proceedings may constitute, I tender gratefully.

First there was the burlesque of a music-hall in which Mr. Leslie Banks, that terrifying Arch-Robot, did some spoof conjuring and bell-ringing, winding up with a terrific performance on the xylophone of the Overture to *William Tell.* The orchestra drowned Mr. Banks completely, but the gestures signified that every note was there. Another item was a mock ventriloquist show, in which both the actor who played Joey and the one who pretended to pretend that he was not speaking—this is muddled, but I cannot make it any plainer—simply took my breath away in admiration.

This was followed by a marvellously clever sketch, beautifully produced. The scene is the consulting-room of a nerve specialist. There they sit, the grey-haired man of science and the young Italian violinist whose world-genius is threatened by creeping paralysis. The doctor holds out no hope, but bids the artist prepare for doom and despair. As the boy goes out to commit suicide the doctor calls him back, and tells him that he is not the specialist, but a playwright, who has taken his friend the doctor's place, as he is writing a play with a similar scene which he wanted to study from life.

"For all I know, my dear fellow, your creeping paralysis may be only biliousness."

"If it comes to that," says the victim, dropping his accent, "I haven't got paralysis, either creepin' or any other blinkin' sort. I 'm a friend of your friend, too, and he put me up to your little game. I 'm an actor! *Now give me the part in your play!*"

The other considers.

"We 'll write to you!" he says in the immemorial words of the theatrical agent. This, of course, brought down the house. As the victim, Mr. Jack Melford was quite marvellously good.

Then there was a wonderful little "period fragment," in which the characters used words like "natheless" and "eftsoons," and which Mr. Basil Dean should seriously consider for his Playbox Theatre. And, perhaps best of all, a comic sketch of which every word, for a bet, began with the letter "w." The characters were an elderly dude, his "mash," and a waiter. The scene was a restaurant, and the conversation went on something like this:

"Waiter!"

But the waiter is asking himself:

"Will Wrist-Watch win Wimbledon Wednesday? Went wonky when Wootton whacked with Waterbury. Wonder whether Worthing weights were wrong."

Now the lady takes a hand.

"Winnie wants whitebait, watercress, woodcock, Welsh-rarebit."

"What 's Winnie's wine?" asks her beau.

"Winnie's wine 's Worthington!" she simpers.

"Works wonders with widows!" whispers Weary Willie.

"When will Winnie wed?" asks the old boy. And so on. Brilliantly ingenious!

Mr. Mark Lester gave a capital imitation of that great artist whom Sarah Bernhardt used to call "Cher Maître." And nobody was more delighted than the "dear master," Willie Clarkson, himself.

A delightful evening! Many thanks!

CONCERNING DETECTIVE STORIES

I ADORE detective stories, but I can never find any to suit my palate. Gaboriau, Poe, Fergus Hume, Conan Doyle, William Le Queux, Boothby—all of these popular masters, and scores besides, commit the cardinal blunder of finding the solution of the mystery in some fact or facts concealed, not deducible from those presented to the reader. The only writer above reproach in this matter is Mr. Chesterton, whose "Father Brown" concoctions are masterpieces of logic. In these every fact essential to the unravelling of the skein is exposed ; indeed, the story is nothing less than a challenge to the deductive faculties of the reader. I have not seen these entrancing tales for several years, and forget whether their author has prefatorily pointed out their singular quality. It would be extraordinarily unlike Mr. Chesterton to have omitted to do so.

The story of which I am so weary goes something like this. A stout, unhealthy-looking individual, half sea-captain, half retired butler, is digging in his back garden in the Earl's Court Road. A piece of paper, weighted by a stone, falls at his feet. It is marked with a scarlet circle containing the single word DOOM. (Why would-be assassins are so prodigal of warning escapes me.) Blodgers, now a jelly of fear, consults Hawk, the famous 'tec, whom he finds in the act of playing the fiddle to his friend Sparrow. The piece is Dvořák's "Humoreske." Hawk commands Blodgers to go about his business in the usual manner, but to visit on his way home a tea-shop and a public-house, and to get his hair cut.

"Your life, Mr. Blodgers," says Hawk solemnly, "is as safe as the Army Bank in which Sparrow and I have invested our life's savings and war gratuities."

Blodgers does as he is told. Hawk, armed with a bull's-eye lantern—in case the November day should turn foggy—and Sparrow—unarmed save for a complete ignorance of London—follow. At the tea-shop they note an individual who differs from the ordinary insurance broker only in this, that he is swarthy and ill-shaven, wears ear-rings and a sombrero, has some cut of the sea about him, and possesses a single arm, a single leg, and one piercing eye. He keeps this fixed upon Blodgers and, when that good man leaves, calls for his bill in Spanish. Otherwise, he is unremarkable. He is observed to follow Blodgers into the pub and the barber's saloon, whence he emerges shaven, but otherwise as before.

" I should not be surprised, Sparrow," says Hawk, " if this were our man. Excuse me a moment." And he slips into a neighbouring telegraph office.

Six hours later Hawk has the gang laid by the heels, to Sparrow's stupefaction. Not for nothing has that eagle eye spied the word " Odontic " scribbled, in Spanish, on the bill of fare handled by our sinister friend ; written in the dust of Minoru's Derby hanging on the taproom wall ; scrawled on the front page of the barber's fortnight-old *Punch*. Not idly has the great man scanned the " arrivals " in yesterday's column devoted to the mercantile marine. It has been the work of a second to connect the ill-omened stranger with the s.s. *Odontic*, arrived the day before from Trincomalee, to wire the chief of police of that outlandish spot—to whom Hawk had been of service in the case of the Mislaid Eunuch—to receive a reply confirming the shrewd notion that the Spaniard is the head of the Throttling Three, an association of Trincomalee Thugs with whose life-savings an Englishman tallying with Blodgers has recently absconded. The wire concluded with a description of the two other throttlers—for whose benefit our Spanish friend has left traces of passage—sufficiently ample to serve Scotland Yard, and with expressions of goodwill and best wishes for Christmas. On hearing of the arrests Blodgers falls dead from delight mingled with heart disease.

The reader will observe that until the *dénouement* he has been presented with no facts beyond the simple one of a gentleman who digs in his garden, receives an unusual letter, and is dogged by an obvious organ-grinder. Almost all detective stories are like this. The Thugs may be foreign adventurers or German spies—the tale remains the same.

I shall submit to the reader a case of a higher order, and I will lay before him all the substantial facts.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN CIGARS.

"On 7th July 1917 Jim Lomas, a young miner, the seventh son of poor parents living at Chapel-en-le-Frith, in Derbyshire, received a German bullet in the abdomen. On 17th July he arrived at a military hospital at Cirencester. At seven o'clock on the following morning seven cigars, of different brands and each smoked seven-eighths of an inch, were found on one of the gate-posts belonging to the residence of the retired Colonel to whose housemaid young Jim was affianced. The house is seven-eighths of a mile from the market-place at Chapel-en-le-Frith."

The incident of the cigars was conveyed to me in awe-stricken tones by the old Colonel when I met him next day in the village street.

"You didn't notice the cigars when you left my house last night?" he asked.

"No," I replied truthfully.

"I 've informed the police," he went on. "They think it most extraordinary."

Now I challenge Lecoq, Holmes, or you, sleuthy reader, to find a fitting explanation. You have all the material facts. . . . Stumped, are you? Very well, then, I will explain.

Young Lomas and I were members of the same village cricket team. His parents being too poor to afford the journey to Cirencester, it devolved upon me to get up a subscription for that purpose. I received the news of his being wounded at 8 P.M. on July 17. At nine o'clock I had received from the Squire a pound note, a stiff glass of whisky, and a first-class "smoke." Hesitating to demand money from the vicar at point of cigar, I left my Corona on the Vicarage gate-post. The worthy cleric gave me a pound note, a stiff whisky, and a Ramon Allones. This I deposited, together with the Corona, on the doctor's gate-post . . . To cut a long story short, when I arrived at the Colonel's I deposited seven cigars by the tail of his couched lion. (I have no notion—beyond the whisky—why I took so much care to retrieve them all.)

As I left, crackling my eighth Bradbury, smoking my eighth cigar, and meditating equally upon the generosity of human nature and pre-war whisky, young Polly Simpson, the housemaid, emerged from the bushes and burst into tears on my bosom.

"Is Jim badly hurt?" she sobbed.

I comforted the poor girl as best I could. But I completely forgot the cigars.

N.B.—The repetition of the figure seven is an intentional red herring.

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

I HAVE received my first Christmas present. It is —need I say?—a calendar. I have arrived at the age when I am supposed to take interest in such things as the height of tides and the phases of the moon, more worldly pleasures being left behind on the shore of a vanished youth. I possess neither nieces to knit me comforters, nor nephews to club together in a pair of carpet slippers. I am, as the French say, between two ages. The day of cricket-bats and skates has gone for ever, the era of hot-water bottles and cushions for the Bath chair is not yet. But my eyes are still held to be bright enough to take pleasure in a calendar, to "find out moonshine," as Bottom says. What matter if the donor be the grocer at the corner, if the robin redbreast, the sprig of holly, the church, and the villagers wending to evening service through the snow—what matter if this pretty picture be something overshadowed by advertisement of Mr. Pottle's hams, teas, pickles, and preserves? 'Twas a kindly thought of Pottle.

Some little time ago I came across the following in the "small ads." column of my morning newspaper: "Wanted to spend Christmas with strictly middle-class family, young children preferred. Lonely Bachelor." This, surely, was a cry from the heart. I know what that bachelor wants. He wants to be in at the great mystery of present-giving, at that orgy of brown-paper and string, to watch the orderly breakfast table grow to the resemblance of a battle-field, to hear the shrieks of children wounded with delight.

We were, God be thanked, a large family. The two eldest received sixpence a week pocket-money, the middles fourpence, and the babies twopence. Each had his or her money-box, and I am proud to say that each of these miniature strong-rooms is still in existence.

Every year, on the first of October, we gave up sweets and started saving for "the presents." To me, as eldest, belonged the immemorial right of presenting my father with a penknife. My next brother laid claim to the blotter. Briefly, each Boxing Day our father's writing-desk stood resplendently forth. To my mother we gave three lace handkerchiefs. To an aunt who lived with us a pair of gloves. It was a near thing, but a small calculation will tell the reader that our united savings came to twenty-four shillings. Do the children of to-day know the intoxication of selection, purchase, and wrapping-up, the peculiar glow of conferring a something upon those who have given them the greatest gift of all? I presume they do.

Sometimes I wonder whether parents study as carefully as they should the things they give their children. As a child I abhorred toy-trains, and as a grown man I spent four years being driven about in Army motor-cars—100 kilometres a day—without once putting a hand on the steering-wheel. If some generous reader were to send me a Rolls-Royce on Christmas morning I should return it by next post, unless it were accompanied by a chauffeur whose wages were guaranteed in perpetuity. Therefore my parents, knowing my tastes, always gave me non-mechanical presents. Those which I cherished most at the time, and which had the greatest influence on my life, were a toy-theatre, a set of chessmen (Staunton) and board, *Robinson Crusoe*, Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the Native*, a bound volume of Beethoven's Sonatas. The great secret of a Christmas present for a child is that it shall be a year too old for him. So shall he grow to it, and not tire within the week.

It is sad to reflect that, as one grows older, one's taste degenerates. Offer me the choice to-day between a complete set of, say, Mr. Conrad's works and a case of champagne, a dozen of whisky, a cabinet of Coronas, my year's consumption of tobacco or golf balls, and I cannot swear that I would choose the master. Shadows we are; but when we reach middle-age it is the concrete which we pursue.

Brother Tom's case was different. He hated books, music, even the theatre, and was never happy unless he was pulling something to pieces and putting it together again. It is absurd to give *The Pilgrim's Progress* to a child who is at heart a tinker. My parents successfully avoided the rock which is Bunyan, but fell headlong into a whirlpool even more fatal. One Christmas they gave Tom a book entitled *Extinct Monsters*. This was a wonderful work with twenty-four coloured plates illustrating the manners and habits of the dinosaur, the dinotherium, the megatherium, and the mastodon—a serious study of the prehistoric creatures which Mr. E. T. Reed was to make famous at a later day.

But Tom would have none of it. Whether it was that he disliked animals—he hates a horse to this day, and has developed into a motor-fiend—or because the pictures frightened him, I do not know. What I do know is that he put his head in our mother's lap and howled. He howled at intervals throughout that day and the next, and was not entirely quietened until the shops reopened and the unfortunate book could be replaced by a carpenter's set. He cut most of his fingers, and was intensely happy.

But there is no doubt that this seventh and inconsolable Christmas left its mark on Tom. The thing passed into a proverb, and to this day we talk, at home, not of a " white elephant," but of an " extinct monster." Beware, parents, lest you afflict your children with a gorgeous gift for which they have no use ! For myself my Christmas present—I shall get no other—suits me well enough. By it I can tell how the water will be for bathing at Margate next August.

" MICAWBER "

I OWED Tufnell the money ; I admit that.

But there, Tufnell was always a nasty fellow. He was "awkward" and disobliging at school, and had been an unpleasant little chap, I imagine, even in his cradle. And when, for old times' sake, he charged me for that little job of painting and papering rather more than twice what even a West End decorator would have done, why then I made up my mind to drag him through the courts, if need be as far as the House of Lords. I had done pretty well in the way of protraction as it was—had submitted first to this order and then to that, paying odd pounds at eleventh hours and so on.

That 's the plot of my little story ; now for the setting. Imagine a ground-floor in Bloomsbury, certified by my lease of same as containing five rooms. Imagine a sitting-room in pale blue and salmon pink—Tufnell was ever addicted to High Art—leading into a bedroom in bottle-green and yellow of a shade between lemon pudding and sulphur ointment. The drama of this little story being confined to these two apartments, a description of the assorted cubby-holes forming the rest of the flat would be without interest. As Tufnell's paint is not more than two years old, the setting of my scene is at least as fresh as that of a No. 4 touring company visiting the No. 3 towns.

It was striking ten—all journalists are honourable lie-abeds—when my ex-bâtman, who still believes me incapable of shaving, dressing, feeding myself, or even blowing my own nose, ordered me to get up.

"There 's two blokes wants you."

"Kick them out!" I mumbled. For it is my conviction, even at my drowsiest, that Ernest is as much a match for any pair of duns as was Troilus for Ajax and Diomed. Was he not champion of his A.S.C. train at the weight?

"Wot 'opes!" said Ernest. "They 've got blinkin' big boots."

"In that case," I said, "let 's be diplomatic. Give the blokes some whisky and tell them to wait."

They waited.

Does the reader remember a picture by, I think, Orchardson? Dawn is stealing wanly through richest tapestries to reveal an apartment the floor of which is strewn with cards. The table is littered with empty decanters. Here and there is a toppled glass. The gambler, haggard, ponders the ashes not only of the dead fire but of his dead life. He contemplates a revolver. In the head, he thinks, were best.

As I struggled into my trousers it flashed across me that my apartment—" rich " in Tufnell's sense of the word—must present a similar view to my visitors, who, I doubted not, were bailiffs disguised as human beings. I had given a Bridge-party on the previous evening. Doubtless there were cards on the floor. A decanter or two, redolent of fragrant Bass or subtle Worthington, of a surety remained upon my gate-legged, pseudo-Jacobean table.

The scene, I felt, was such as a painter might have immortalized. Possessing no dressing-gown of heavy silk, embossed with tea-roses and tiger-lilies—the immemorial wear of a Charles Surface at bay with the world—I struggled into an old golf jacket. As I did so I remembered that on the previous evening I had won every rubber, that the " doings " had come to well over two pounds, and that the only talk of revolvers had been when Tompkins—a decent fellow, though a bank clerk—swore to shoot me on the spot if I didn't refund him sufficient for his taxi to Hammersmith and his next morning's Tube to Threadneedle Street. Yes, it had been a successful evening.

" What are you two blokes after ? " I asked. " Come to the point, as I want my breakfast."

They came to the point.

"Two pounds nine shillings and sixpence is wot we want," said a cove with the boots of the middle member of the Pender Troupe of Giants.

"Or else ?"

"Or else our orders is to take you to Brixton," put in the other, who was obviously from the outsize department, even for Giants.

"Don't talk soft, Mr. Brownrigg," said his companion. "Of course the gent. 's going to pay up. And look pleasant."

There was some fumbling with papers, and I realized that these "the said High Bailiff, Bailiffs, and others were required to take the said Defendant, James Agate, and deliver him to the Governor of the said Prison and him safely keep for twenty-one days or until he shall be sooner discharged by due course of law." In other words, the choice lay between quod and shelling out the whole of my previous night's winnings upon the wretched Tufnell's "balance of account." It was when they spoke of the bath and two attendants, fellow-prisoners, with swab and mop that I made my choice.

"They 'll tell yer ter strip," said one.

"I 'll see them in blazes !" I answered.

"They 'll see yer in the bath," they retorted. "With the mop-end."

That decided me.

Unfortunately, the greater part of my previous evening's plunder had consisted of my friends' I.O.U.'s. I simply hadn't got £2, 9s. 6d. The blokes simply wouldn't take a cheque. Would they wait while Ernest went to the bank? They would. . . . My visitors introduced themselves. Postlethwaite had been a Cumberland wrestler; Brownrigg, ex-heavy-weight champion of the Z Division. (Ernest is only a feather.)

" Me and my missus and the lodger often 'as a game of cards," said the wrestler. " D' yer know ' Micawber '? It 's a good game fer three. Yer goes by wot turns up."

We played, and I had won sevenpence when Ernest came back. We were in the middle of a hand.

" Here 's the money," I said.

" Never mind that," said the ex-heavy-weight, who had grown quite excited. " Your play, sir ! "

Clubs were trumps, and I played the Queen. Postlethwaite discarded a small diamond. " Ace ! " shouted Brownrigg, and took the trick.

Come to think of it, it was inevitable. The ace of trumps has its permanent home up the Law's sleeve.

IN THE CITY

Recently I desired to raise sufficient money to pay the first premium on a life-insurance policy which I proposed to take out for £1000, payable at sixty. There is, for me, only one way of saving money; and that way is to purchase something on the instalment system. I have in this way already saved £13—the first payment on a 200-guinea baby grand. The piano people are getting a little nervous about the second instalment, now two months and twenty-seven days overdue. But the poltroonery of people connected with that instrument is notorious, and for sheer lack of nerve there is little to choose between your piano-tuner and your pew-opener. But let that pass. The point is that I have saved £13, and saved it compulsorily. I cannot go out of an evening and "blue" F sharp, or any other part of my hoard. The thing keeps itself intact automatically.

The idea was no new one. Already I own eleven thirty-sixths of my "handsomely appointed flat" (see booklet), and am looking forward to the sole and undisputed ownership, round about the first of January 1926, of that Louis Quinze sideboard, Louis Seize wardrobe, and four Georges Cinq rush-bottom chairs. But furniture alone did not seem to me to be saving money fast enough. The choice lay between a life-insurance policy and a motor-car. A delightful six-cylinder S.K.I.D. was offered me at just under a hundred a year, whereas the other thing could be effected for sixty. I decided for the insurance simply and solely because the less I had to borrow at the beginning, the more, it seemed to me, I should save in the end.

The great thing in these matters is to have good agents. I chose mine with extreme care, good fellows both—A.S.C. Majors who, I remembered, never called beyond their cards at Bridge. Major Penwortham Pilkinghorn, D.S.O., M.C., knew of an insurance company whose doctor was "a good sort, as blind as a bat and would pass a hippopotamus with angina pectoris after it had run up six flights of stairs." Major B. F. Beamish—without other distinguishing initials—was the intimate chum of the managing director of the Optimist and Cheerio Consolidated Mutual Trust and Emergency Fund, Limited. These gentry, he assured me, thought nothing of lending £10,000 on day of application and on note of hand alone at 10 per cent. interest or less, to suit customer's convenience.

Armed with these guarantees, I gave up a day's work and sallied forth into the City, arriving at a bar near the Mansion House at one o'clock precisely. Four City men awaited me.

"Better sherry than we used to get at Etaples!" said Pilkinghorn.

This was contested by Pilkinghorn's friend, whose name I did not gather. I was given to understand that he was "just an insurance bloke." We had another glass round to settle the delicate point.

At lunch Beamish's pal—it seems that to go about the City unattended is *infra dig.*—insisted upon cracking a bottle just because, a short time ago, it had been Christmas. Three, to be precise, were put out of action. There is something niggardly about a magnum among five, and personally I have no respect for the man who can drink two-fifths of anything. After lunch, which consisted of oysters, saddle of mutton, Welsh rarebit, and the aforesaid three bottles (Roederer 1914, and very good, too), I ventured to suggest going before the doctor, the preliminaries having been filled up over the sherry. The proposal was put off until we had "adjourned" for port. It seems that lunch in the City is a hard-and-fast ritual, and that each part of the ceremony has its particular temple.

The interview with the doctor was of the least alarming. From the perfectly footling inquiries he made about my medical history and as to which toe my great-grandfather had had the gout in, I knew him to be the complete ass. I managed to score off him without the least difficulty.

" How much do you drink ? " he asked. " Not to-day, but as a rule ? "

You know the sort of thing. Would I swear that it was less than three pints of beer a day ? I objected that I often drink whisky. Would I swear that my daily allowance was not more than two ounces ?

" I don't drink by weight," I said, with my most dignified air. " Sometimes I have an odd glass of champagne, and at Christmas there 's my Aunt Susan's ginger-wine. I drink quite a lot of that."

He seemed nettled. His pen poised in the air.

" I must put down something," he said.

" You put down what you like," I retorted, " and let me go on putting down what I like ! "

We passed on to other matters.

After the coffee and cigars Beamish announced that the time to approach Shylock was at hand. The others would await us at a little tea-place that they wotted of. On the way I coveted a magnificent briar pipe with amber mouthpiece.

"Wait till we 've interviewed our friend," said Beamish.

Shylock was urbane, pointedly civil, and, I judged, a man of extremely amiable character. He made only two difficulties. The first was that unless some repayments amounting to £27,000 came in by first post next morning he should have difficulty in laying his hands upon even so trifling a sum as sixty pounds. The second stumbling-block was disclosed when I pleaded guilty to being a journalist.

"If it wasn't for Fleet Street," he said, "my firm would make money! However, do you think you could repay £110 in six monthly instalments?"

I thought I could. I am a determined fellow when it comes to saving money. His directors would consider me, he said, and I should hear shortly.

I bought that pipe.

On the following day but one my post-bag contained two letters, and two only. Pilkinghorn wrote:

> "I regret very much that my Actuary cannot advise the Spreadeagle Insurance Company to issue a policy in your case."

Shylock's letter was printed:

> "With reference to your application the Directors require you to find a surety . . ."

So that all the saving effected that day was one briar pipe, or £3, 15s. Hardly worth going to the City for! It seems to me that I shall simply have to put by in the ordinary way till I can fork out the first hundred for the S.K.I.D., that genuine piece of economy on four wheels.

A CURE FOR SNOBS

The real reason of my dash to X-on-Sea was that I was getting a trifle fed up with George, who had undertaken to turn a novel of mine into a film. I have always understood this to be a very profitable business, though somewhat trying to the author's vanity. The film company, it appears, gives you £1000 for the title and plot of your book, then changes the incidents so that the story becomes unrecognizable, and finally puts the thing out under a different name. So what they give the author £1000 for is a mystery. Still, if they are throwing sums of money about. . . .

I was a bit annoyed with George, I confess. My story has to do with an old bookseller whose fiery spirit has worn out his body as a sword wears out its sheath. It is called *Scabbard and Steel.* The books are dusted by a seventeen-year-old grand-niece, who—and this is quite an insignificant point in the tale—is beloved by the chemist's assistant round the corner. This affair occupies in my story exactly half a page. In the film the bookseller disappears, and little Fuchsia becomes the heroine. George has her abducted by an entirely imaginary theatrical magnate, who takes her off in his six-cylinder Magnolia. The chemist's assistant commandeers the bicycle of the butcher-boy next door, and makes off in hot pursuit. . . .

I was speechless with indignation as George recounted all this.

" I 've got a ripping title," he said. " I shall call it ' The Love Chase.' "

So off we went. I couldn't get rid of George. I had invited him for the week-end, and whither I went, etc., etc. The best I could do was to compromise, and we agreed to leave the novel and scenario behind, and to drop the subject.

Now I am going to confess that George and I are rather superior folk. We stay at boarding-houses because they 're cheap, and talk about the Elysée Palace at Nice or the Majestic at Monte Carlo. Our bodies may be walking the esplanade at X-on-Sea, but our souls are taking the air at Biarritz. In other words, I am afraid we are a trifle snobbish. We made sarcastic remarks on the photographs in the railway carriage—" Plaistow by Moonlight : the English Lucerne " was one of my efforts—on the beauty of the landscape round Barking, on the smug little villas facing the mud at Ozoneville.

We selected an hotel where they give you inclusive terms, and we made bright, highbrow remarks about everybody and everything. They wanted us to dance, and an M.C. indicated a fat old woman who lacked a partner. But I countered by asking the chef d'orchestre if he could play Scriabinsky's Symphonic Fox-trot: "Posthumous Opossums." On Sunday morning we saw a fellow-guest, whom we had dubbed The Shop-Walker, descending the stairs with a bag of golf clubs. Suddenly his foot slipped, and he went crash, niblick-foremost, into a magnificent jar of alleged Doulton large enough to have contained each and every one of the forty thieves.

" He 's smashed it, by Jove ! " I cried.

" He 's *dinted* it, you mean ! " said George. " The blessed thing 's made out of tin."

And we laughed mirthlessly. The rest of the morning was spent in ridiculing the statue to Queen Victoria, which we decided to be the worst in the world after Tooting Broadway's memorial to King Edward VII. But why should I go on ? If George and I are not quite as objectionable a pair as I have described, *there are some who are* !

Our walk had brought us to a point of the promenade just above the ornamental bandstand. The sun had set, and a pale crescent moon and one star glimmered in a sky saddening from turquoise to slate. To these a stone finger pointed.

"Probably a War Memorial," said George. "Let 's go and look."

It was as George supposed. The monument was a simple obelisk, draped with two flags, and having the plainest of dedications and that handful of words with which Laurence Binyon has achieved immortality. But it was neither the words nor the stone which gave both of us a sudden catch at the heart. At the foot of the Memorial was a grass-plot, and in that plot there were little beds of flowers—snowdrops. The careful gardener had so arranged them that they spelled :

LEST
WE
FORGET.

And the grass round the snowdrops was spangled with crocuses, with white and purple crocuses.

We sat on the steps round the foot of the obelisk for some time. Then George pulled out his pipe, and I did the same. We found ourselves leaning against the Memorial. Then George said he supposed we ought not to be doing that, and I noticed that one or two passers-by looked scandalized.

"I don't know," I replied. "In a way it seems more friendly." And I told George about the very beautiful monument in Lincoln's Inn, which is deliberately fashioned so that you may rest your back against the inscription. The great point about memorials is that they shall bring you into some kind of communion with those who are gone. There is something in the actual contact with the stone. . . .

Then my mind went back to the cause whereby we came to be at X-on-Sea. And I realized that all the novels that were ever written, all the pictures painted and songs sung, weigh nothing when put against human lives; that in this scale only those works of art are weighty which young men sacrificed and achieved not, that their country might be saved.

"Do what you like with that silly book of mine," I said.

"Right-o," George replied. "But I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking that I 'm going to dance with that fat old woman."

He did. We both did.

And enjoyed it!

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